OTP, No. 4

(43)

the American Scholar

WINTER 1998

$6.95 / $9.00 Canada

The Historical Roots of Racism
BERNARD LEWIS

Teaching American History
A FORUM

A. J. Liebling at Work
DAN PINCK

Album of Giles
STANLEY KAUFFMANN

The Paternal Imperative
DAVID GUTMANN

Of Paradoxes and Tautologies
BERT O. STATES

Gertrude Stein and the Lost Ark
BRENDA WINEAPPLE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New from Chicago

The Calling of Education

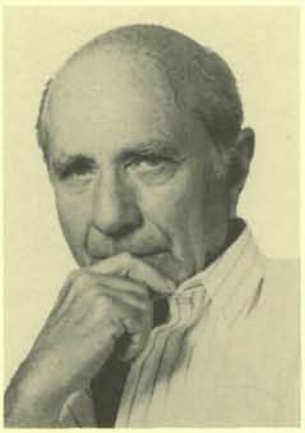
"The Academic Ethic" and Other Essays on Higher Education

EDWARD SHILS

Edited, and with an Introduction, by Steven Grosbey

"From the opening pages, defining the 'academic ethic' as a commitment to truth, to the final pages, describing the purposes and limits of 'academic freedom,' this book is a refreshing antidote to the fashionable dogmas that threaten to subvert the humanistic university, in America and abroad." —Gertrude Himmelfarb, author of *The De-Moralization of Society*

***Paper $14.95**



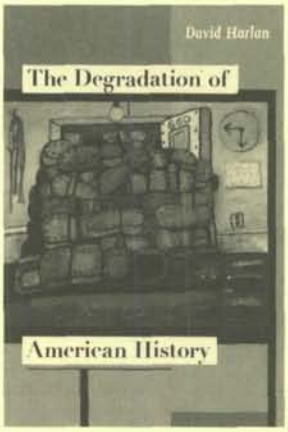
History Continues

GEORGES DUBY

Translated by Arthur Goldhammer

"[Duby] conveys the unfailing freshness and excitement of research among the parchment books and rolls, the satisfaction that comes from restoring the dead to memory, and the importance of prodigious reading, discipline, modesty, and imagination to success in the loneliest métier."—*Virginia Quarterly*

***Paper $14.95**



The Degradation of American History

DAVID HARLAN

"History has always belonged to the moral disciplines, and Harlan makes a compelling case for its return to its earlier, prescientific calling. A fine, intelligent, and passionate book, quite unlike anything I have read in this field over the last forty years." —Hayden White, University of California, Santa Cruz, and Stanford University

***Paper $15.95**

The Autumn of the Middle Ages

JOHAN HUIZINGA

Translated by Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch

Johan Huizinga's classic portrait of life, thought, and art in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century France and the Netherlands.

"The advantages of the new translation are so many. . . . It is one of the greatest, as well as one of the most enthralling, historical classics of the twentieth century, and everyone will surely want to read it in the form that was obviously intended by the author."—Francis Haskell, *New York Review of Books*

Paper $19.95

***Cloth edition available**

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

5801 South Ellis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60637 VISIT US AT HTTP://WWW.PRESS.UCHICAGO.EDU

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ALLEN A. KNOLL, PUBLISHERS

salutes

JOSEPH EPSTEIN

for his erudition, wit and for
the time he so generously spent making
The American Scholar
the premier magazine of the intellect.

ALLEN A. KNOLL, PUBLISHERS
BOOKS FOR INTELLIGENT PEOPLE WHO READ FOR FUN
(800) 777-7623

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The staff of *The American Scholar* would like to express their deepest appreciation to Joseph Epstein for the excellence he has brought to the *Scholar*'s pages issue after issue for the past twenty-three years. This, his last issue, is an enlarged edition in celebration of his long and distinguished editorship.

Joseph Epstein has edited the *Scholar* as the finest athletes and artists perform—seemingly without effort. He has brought to his work exceptional skill and discrimination, grace and humor, generosity of spirit and joy. For all who have written for him, he epitomizes the editor *par excellence.* For all the dedicated readers of Aristides' column, he epitomizes wisdom tempered by wit. For all who have worked with him, he epitomizes the word *gentleman.*

As editor of this quarterly journal, as an author who has given so much pleasure in his quarterly columns, and as a friend and colleague, Joseph Epstein will be greatly missed. We are very honored to have had the opportunity to work with him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the American Scholar

Published for
General Circulation
by
PHI BETA KAPPA

EDITORIAL BOARD

PETER BROWN
JOEL E. COHEN
WM. THEODORE DE BARY
RENÉE C. FOX
JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN
VARTAN GREGORIAN

WERNER GUNDERSHEIMER
NEIL HARRIS
PAUL McHUGH
JUDITH MARTIN
EDWARD ROTHSTEIN
EUGEN WEBER

JOSEPH EPSTEIN, *Editor*
FREDERICK J.CROSSON, *Consulting Editor*
JEAN STIPICEVIC, *Managing Editor*
SANDRA COSTICH, *Associate Editor*
EDNA NWABUFO, *Subscription Manager*
LYNETTE EDWARDS, *Subscription Assistant*

Advertising Representative: CLAIRE ISELI, 2108 Kingshouse Road, Silver Spring, Maryland 20905. Telephone: 301-384-2440. *U.S.A. Newsstand Distribution:* EASTERN NEWS DISTRIBUTORS, INC., 250 West 55th Street, New York, New York 10019.

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR® (ISSN 0003-0937), published quarterly since 1932 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. For subscription information call 202-265-3808. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright © 1997 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society. Printed in the U.S.A.

POSTMASTER: Send all change of address notices, undeliverable copies, subscription orders, and other mail to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Subscription rates: for individuals, $25.00 one year, $48.00 two years, $69.00 three years, $6.95 a copy; for institutions, $30.00 one year, $58.00 two years, $84.00 three years, $8.00 a copy; foreign and Canadian, $3.00 a year additional for postage.

Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury. The opinions expressed in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR are those of the author of each article and not necessarily those of the Editor, the Editorial Board, or the officers of the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

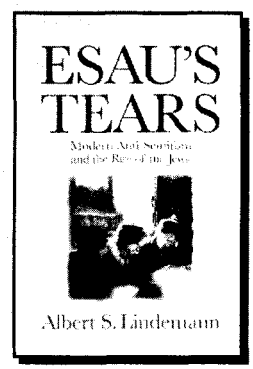
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OUTSTANDING SCHOLARSHIP

Esau's Tears

Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews

Albert S. Lindemann



"...richly informative... There's much provocative, compelling material here."
— Kirkus Reviews

"...sure to generate controversy...Lindemann displays a wide breadth of history and of the historical literature."
—Publishers Weekly

In clear, moving prose, *Esau's Tears* explores the remarkable and revealing variety of modern anti-Semitism, from its emergence in the 1870s in a racial-political form to the eve of the Nazi takeover, in the major countries of Europe and in the United States. In contrast to much present scholarship, Lindemann suggests that anti-Semitism in these years was more ambiguous; less pervasive and central to the lives of both Jews and non-Jews.

59369-7 Hardback $34.95

The Theatre of Robert Wilson

Arthur Holmberg

Robert Wilson, the leading American avant-garde theater director, revolutionized the stage by making visual communication more important than words. His productions cut across the boundaries that traditionally have defined theater, dance, opera and the visual arts to create a total work of art. This book, the first comprehensive study of Wilson, traces the evolution of the director's astonishing career.

36492-2 Hardback $54.95

John Barrymore, Shakespearean Actor

Michael A. Morrison

"Michael Morrison's most readable study vividly recreates act by act the Shakespearean art of one of America's most charismatic and influential modern stage actors."
— Margot Peters, author of *The House of Barrymore*

"...a fresh perspective of the extraordinary man, John Barrymore. Fluent, incisive, meticulous, faithful, to fact...richly researched with a superb, sustained quality of writing. The fascination is endless."
— William Luce, author of the play *Barrymore*

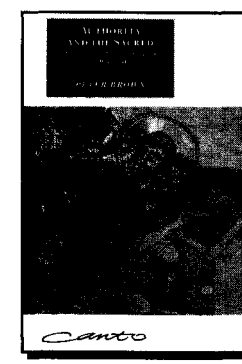
62028-7 Hardback $29.95

Now in a Canto edition...

Authority and the Sacred

Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World

Peter Brown



The Christianization of the Roman world lies at the root of modern Europe. This fascinating study examines the factors that proved decisive and the compromises that made the emergence of the Christian conception of existence possible: how the old gods of the Roman Empire could be reinterpreted as symbols to further the message of the Church.

59557-6 Paperback $9.95

Available in bookstores or from

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211.
Call toll-free 800-872-7423. Web site: http://www.cup.org
MasterCard/VISA accepted. Prices subject to change.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTENTS

I'm History
Aristides 7

The Historical Roots of Racism
Bernard Lewis 17

A. J. Liebling, A Writist at Work: Old Days at *The New Yorker*
Dan Pinck 27

Of Paradoxes and Tautologies
Bert O. States 51

Album of Giles
Stanley Kauffmann 67

Teaching American History
William Cronon, John Patrick Diggins, Eric Foner, John Higham, David A. Hollinger, Linda K. Kerber, John Lukacs, Walter A. McDougall Edmund Morgan, Diane Ravitch, and *C. Vann Woodward* 91

Gertrude Stein: Woman Is a Woman Is
Brenda Wineapple 107

My Stardust Memories
William Zinsser 113

The Paternal Imperative
David Gutmann 118

Jewish Fathers: And Sons and Daughters
Carol Iannone 131

In Quest of Graham Hough
Peter Schwendener 139

The Prosaic Willa Cather
James Seaton 146

Rediscovering Mina Loy
Joshua Weiner 151

POETRY

The Gardener, *Patricia Hooper,* 26; The Naturalist, *Eugene Schlanger,* 49; To Nancy *and* The Friend, *Frederick Morgan,* 88; The Purse, *Robert Cording,* 90; Caesarean, *Daniel Mark Epstein,* 112; Family Portrait, *Rebecca Lee Yates,* 117; The Mandolin and the Tenor, *Norbert Krapf,* 127; Road to Santipur, *Maureen Micus Crisick,* 129; Brussels Sprouts, *Catharine Savage Brosman,* 159

BOOKS

A Profile—Straight On
Jeremy Bernstein 160

Reviews
Edison Miyawaki, Jonathan Elukin, William H. Pritchard, Morris Freedman, Christopher Clausen, Alexandra Mullen, Robert C. Jones 164

THE READER REPLIES 190

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Peabody Museum, Harvard University

THE BIBLE AS IT WAS

JAMES KUGEL

This is a guide to the Hebrew Bible unlike any other. Proceeding chapter by chapter through its most important stories—from the Creation and the Tree of Knowledge through the Exodus from Egypt and the journey to the Promised Land—James Kugel shows the transformation of the Bible into the text known today. Drawing on such sources as the Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient Jewish apocrypha, Hellenistic writings, long-lost retellings of Bible stories, and prayers and sermons of the early church and synagogue, Kugel shows how the texts of the interpreted Bible became sacred in their own right, endowing complex religious traditions with deeper levels of meaning.

Belknap Press • 24 halftones

$35.00 cloth

ACADEMIC DUTY

DONALD KENNEDY

In this important new book Donald Kennedy, former president of Stanford University and currently a member of its faculty, brings his experience and concern to bear on the present state of the university. He examines the numerous pressures that academics face, from the pursuit of open inquiry in the midst of culture wars, to confusion and controversy over the ownership of ideas, to the scramble for declining research funds. He goes on to examine academic misconduct—scholarly, financial, and personal. With vision and compassion, he offers an important antidote to recent attacks from without, and calls upon the college community to counter those attacks by looking within and fulfilling its duties.

$29.95 cloth

THE FOOTNOTE

A Curious History

ANTHONY GRAFTON

The weapon of pedants, the scourge of undergraduates, the bête noire of the "new" liberated scholar: the lowly footnote emerges in this book as a singular resource with a surprising history that says volumes about the evolution of modern scholarship. In Anthony Grafton's engrossing account, footnotes to history give way to footnotes as history, recounting in their subtle way the progress of knowledge in written form. Proceeding with the spirit of an intellectual mystery, *The Footnote* brings what is so often relegated to afterthought and marginalia to its rightful place in the center of the literary life of the mind.

$22.95 cloth

THE PLATYPUS AND THE MERMAID

And Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination

HARRIET RITVO

"Cats is 'dogs,' and rabbits is 'dogs,' and so's parrots; but this 'ere 'tortis' is a insect, so there ain't no charge for it" a porter explains to an astonished traveler in a nineteenth-century *Punch* cartoon. Railways were not the only British institution to schematize the world: the Victorians had a fervor for order. A thoroughly absorbing account of taxonomy—as zoological classification and as anthropological study—*The Platypus and the Mermaid* offers a new perspective on the constantly shifting interactions of scientific lore, cultural ideas, and the popular imagination.

52 halftones • $29.95 cloth

Harvard University Press

800-448-2242

www.hup.harvard.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Life and Letters

I'm History

JOSEPH EPSTEIN

This is, I believe, my ninety-second Aristides essay, and my final one. I should have liked to have rounded the number off at an even hundred, but it was not to be. The first such essay, titled "A Literary Mafia?," ran in the Spring 1975 issue. It was the only Aristides essay to carry a biographical note, which read: "Aristides will comment from time to time in this column on matters of cultural and intellectual interest. He is not, nor is he in any way related to, that same Aristides whom the citizens of Athens were supposed to have ostracized because they grew tired of always hearing him called The Just."

When I instituted this column under the rubric "Life and Letters," my plan was to let other, often distinguished, members of the magazine's editorial board fire off essays under names of their own choosing. But no one stepped forth to write the second essay, so I wrote it, and the same was true of the third, which I also wrote. By the sixth or seventh, I would not have relinquished the "Life and Letters" column to anyone, so fond had I become of writing it, and so I just wrote the next eight-five or so essays myself.

No writing, I have to report, has come as easily to me. I never wanted for a subject, and—capacious gasbag that I am—I always had the 6,500 words needed to cover that subject. By rough count, I have written nearly 600,000 words in this space. I have produced five books of essays from the Aristides column and am preparing a sixth. Aristides The Just? A lot closer to Aristides The Loquacious, I'd say.

Soon after beginning these Aristides pieces, I heard it bruited about that I had reinvented the familiar essay, the form begun in England by Addison and Steele and brought to a high sheen by Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt. Closer to our day, it continued in the vastly different work of Max Beerbohm and George Orwell. It was nice to hear this; I love being thought in the line of succession of such writers, but reinventing anything was very far from what I had set out to do. As I saw it, my task was to fill up eight pages of each quarter's AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

I usually had a three-month lead on these essays. During this time notions, quotations, and occasionally something that felt suspiciously like an idea would occur to me, and I would write them down and place them in a manila folder. Sometimes I found apposite quotations in a series of commonplace books I keep. Many people thought that I pulled these quotations out of my sleeve and that I possessed one of the great memories of the age. Not quite so. Nor did I have much of a sense of structure. I never began one of these essays with more than a general feeling about where I wanted it to go. I decided to let interest dictate structure: if I could manage to write one interesting paragraph after another, I believed, structure would take care of itself. My motto became Yogi Berra's wise saying, "When you reach a crossroad, take it." The trick with these essays is to take what seems a small or mildly amusing subject and open it up, allow it to exfoliate, so that by the end something arises that might be larger and more intricate than anyone—including the author—had expected.

I have had the most generous response imaginable to these essays. I don't know how many letters I have had from readers who appreciated them, or wished to argue with points made in them, found errors in them, or even hated them, but the number must be in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the thousands. What made these letters all the more pleasurable is that I never wrote any of the essays with particular readers in mind. If one tends to write for anyone, it is, in my experience, an editor; and in this case, I was the editor (though I was often saved the embarrassment of being caught out in egregious errors by my two friends and co-editors Jean Stipicevic and Sandra Costich). In fact, I wrote the Aristides essays and I edited THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR for myself and for strangers who might happen to share my interests.

The question of what I might do for readers of this magazine came up only once, when I was being interviewed for the job of editor. The year was 1974, and the smoke from the years of "student unrest"—still my favorite of all euphemisms—had not yet cleared. One of the members of Phi Beta Kappa's search committee, who was then president of the University of Virginia, in a most earnest voice with a southern accent, asked me: "Mr. Epstein, what would you do, if you were editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, for the young among your readers?" I thought for perhaps two seconds then replied: "I would let them grow older."

The sangfroid of that reply was based on two things: first, I genuinely didn't care much about the young, that transient class that wasn't, after all, an ethnic group; and, second, I didn't in any event really think I would get the job, which made candor all the easier. A few months before, my friend Hilton Kramer told me that he had put me up for the job in answer to a letter from Robert Heilman, the literary critic, asking for candidates. Not long after, I received a call from Professor Heilman telling me that I was on the shortlist of candidates and asking if I would agree to come to New York to be interviewed. I said yes, sure, why not?

When the date of the interview was announced, I suggested to my lady friend, who has long since been my wife, that she join me for a day in New York. She could go to Bloomingdales for sunglasses, which she needed, while I was interviewed, and then we could have a good early dinner and fly back to Chicago. It would be a larky day in old New York, and half the expenses would be paid by Phi Beta Kappa, a society whose qualifications I never came close to meeting as a student.

My friend found a fine pair of sunglasses, we had a swell dinner at a restaurant on Sixty-third Street called The Running Footman, and the interview apparently must have come off well, for I got the job. I did, however, tell one rather large lie during the interview, though I wasn't aware that it was a lie at the time. I said that I would attempt to edit a magazine marked by disinterestedness in the political conflicts of the day—which at that time were still between intellectuals gathered around such magazines as *Commentary* and the *New York Review of Books*. As it turned out, though I do not think of myself as a passionately political person, I could not stay disinterested forever.

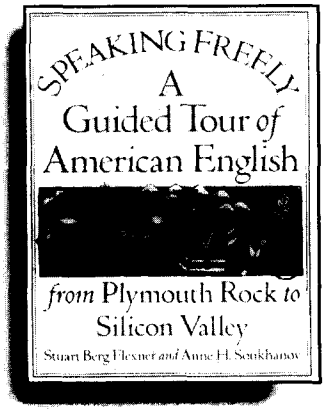
I was pleased to have gotten the job as editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. When I told my dear friend Edward Shils about it, he said, "Oh, Joseph, this will be very good for the country." Edward would sometimes say such grandiose things, and in this case I thought he was vastly overstating things, but I believe he meant it.

I was thirty-seven when I became editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. It did not seem a particularly youthful age to me, then or now. I had written a single book, on the lugubrious subject of divorce, and a hundred or so essays and book reviews. I had thought of myself mainly as a writer for magazines. The best editors, I have come to believe, are those who do not themselves write, or at least not regularly. They become monomaniacs—in the manner of Harold Ross and William Shawn of *The New Yorker*—on behalf of their magazines, whereas editors who write are divided between their editor's monomania and their writer's egomania. As an editor, I carried on a fairly full writing life—publishing eleven books during my years at THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR—and thus, mono- and egomaniac both, cannot be said to have given myself entirely to the magazine.

I was early addicted to magazines, beginning with *Sport* and *Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post* in the 1940s. Magazines, chiefly intellectual magazines—the early *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, *Kenyon Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Sewanee Review*, and *Encounter* (in England)—but also *The New Yorker* and *Harper's* and the *Atlantic*, had contributed more to my largely autodidactic education than any university or educational institution. I was delighted to have control of such a magazine.

My wife, who is a Phi Beta Kappa, had a subscription to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, and I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"This is the best book to rouse word and Americana buffs....

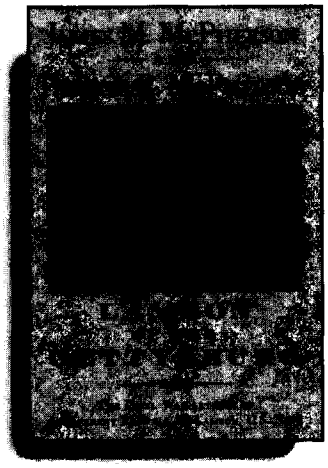
Enriched with hundreds of illustrations and marginal quotations, the book not only tells the stories behind Americanisms, their origins and histories, but also reveals the values, politics, preoccupations, and foibles reflected in them"—*Booklist.*

ANNE H. SOUKHANOV AND STUART BERG FLEXNER

SPEAKING FREELY

A Guided Tour of American English from Plymouth Rock to Silicon Valley

$35.00, 448 pages, 450 illustrations



"An engrossing and remarkable collection about an overlooked but important aspect of the war"—*Booklist.*

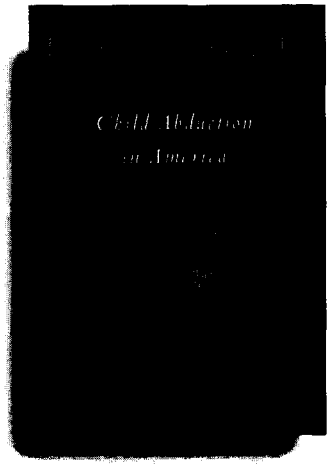
"A unique collection of wartime letters...ably edited and annotated by Pulitzer prize-winning historian James McPherson and independent researcher Patricia McPherson"—*Kirkus Reviews.*

EDITED BY JAMES M. McPHERSON AND PATRICIA R. McPHERSON

LAMSON OF THE GETTYSBURG

The Civil War Letters of Lieutenant Roswell H. Lamson, U.S. Navy

$25.00, 224 pp.



"A rare combination of riveting narrative and acute, provocative historical and cultural analysis"

—*Sissela Bok.*

Kidnapped is a mesmerizing look at some of the great kidnapping cases in American history, stories that have haunted parents over the past 125 years.

PAULA S. FASS

KIDNAPPED

Child Abduction in America

$25.00, 320 pages, 27 halftones

At better bookstores. Or call 1-800-451-7556 (M-F, 9-5 EST)

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS www.oup-usa.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would always have a look at it but rarely found all that much to read in it. The magazine edited by my predecessor, an extraordinary man named Hiram Haydn, was a great hotchpotch. Hiram Haydn, whom I never met, was a large man who wrote large novels (a thick novel of his titled *The Hands of Esau* was in all the used-book shops I haunted in the mid-seventies). He was a teacher, a novelist, the author of a book on the Renaissance, a psychoanalysand, and a publisher whose specialty was young novelists (William Styron was his most famous discovery) and who was one of the founders of the firm of Atheneum. He was also a high roller, a sport. In the summer he used to fly the staff of the magazine up to his place at Martha's Vineyard to read page proofs.

The way he ran his magazine was, as near as I can make out, not all that carefully. Occasionally good things appeared in it. In 1960, his publishing firm, Atheneum, brought out *The American Scholar Reader*, which has many distinguished contributors, but one had the sense that they tended to send the magazine their less-than-best efforts. The most famous piece to have run in the magazine was a spoof by Richard Rovere, *The New Yorker*'s Washington correspondent, on the American Establishment, which caused an amusing stir in its day.

But one didn't have a sense of a strong hand at the helm. If anything, the AMERICAN SCHOLAR of those years seemed a bit small-town, a touch corny. Its book review section carried the rubric "The Revolving Bookstand." Biographical notes on contributors tended to be folksy, informing readers that this or that poet liked to water-ski with her four children and cocker spaniel at the family summer home on Lake Tippicanoe. One of its regular columns, devoted to biological and ecological subjects and written by a Nobel Prize-winning biologist, carried the rubric "The Despairing Optimist," causing a friend of mine to wonder why its author didn't get off the damn fence.

The title of the magazine came, of course, from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay, originally delivered as a Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard, and the magazine then carried under its title the rather self-congratulatory tag line, in caps, A QUARTERLY FOR THE INDEPENDENT THINKER, followed by an Emerson quotation: "In the right state the scholar is Man Thinking." I soon removed both the tag line and the quotation, though for a long period after I became editor of the magazine, it seemed that anyone who wrote an essay or gave a speech on Emerson sent it to me. Poor fellows, did they ever miss hitting the mark.

If THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR was truly a quarterly for the independent thinker, its circulation ought to have been somewhere between thirty and forty, for I doubt that the country has ever had more than that number of independent thinkers (I'm not sure I quite qualify as one myself, though I still hope to get there). Instead, when I became the editor of the magazine, it had a circulation of roughly 30,000, small change in the world of mass-magazine publishing but impressive for a quarterly intellectual journal.

The job of editor had, for reasons a bit cloudy to me, immense prestige. "Do you know Joseph Epstein?" people would say when introducing me when I first began the job, adding, "He's the editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR." Or: "You know Joe Epstein, the editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR." For a while I began to think "the editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR" was part of my name rather like "the wiley" seemed to be part of Ho Chi Minh's name in the American press. I also began to feel a bit like "Johnson of the OPA" in one of the first off-color jokes I heard as a boy. In the joke, Johnson was a man who felt that his affiliation with an important institution—the Office of Price Administration during World War II—allowed him to help himself to sexual favors from hitherto strange women: "It's all right," he'd say, "I'm Johnson of the OPA." "I'm Epstein of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR," I used to joke with my wife, "and I do believe I'll have another piece of cake."

Part of the prestige of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR derived from its connection with Phi Beta Kappa, which Edward Shils, who could also be wonderfully deflationary, used to describe as an organization set up to confirm neurotic Jewish mothers in the rightness of their persistent nagging of their children to study harder. Its prestige derived, too, from its editorial board, which could, as the English used to say, be very "namey," or at least seemed so to me at the time. When I came on the job, members of the editorial board included Jacques Barzun, Lillian Hellman, Robert Motherwell, William Styron, Diana Trilling, Kenneth B. Clark, J. Bronowski, and John Archibald

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wheeler. The board then met thrice a year, twice in New York, once in Washington. At its meetings, board members discussed magazine policy and recommended writers and subjects for the editor to pursue for future issues.

Although I have never been able to sustain awe for very long, I approached my early meetings with the editorial board with what I would describe as mild trepidation. I soon learned that most board members were barely interested, a number to the point of not even having read the magazine. Some—I think in particular of Jacques Barzun—were extremely helpful, both in board meetings and in writing for the magazine. Some said little. John Archibald Wheeler, an important physicist, never spoke, but at the end of the meetings he always handed me a small piece of paper with the names of scientists from whom I might get interesting material.

A number of the board members clearly disliked one another. They were, after all, intellectuals, and intellectuals are nothing if not disputatious. Diana Trilling and Lillian Hellman were nearly in litigation with each other. But in the editorial board meetings they never argued. I thought this an impressive show of decorum. A friend of mine said that what I failed to understand was that each of these women was more temperamental than a diva, but each, Diana and Lillian, sang different roles.

I liked Lillian Hellman and thought her very smart, except when the initials CIA or FBI appeared in her sentences. (Unfortunately, they appeared in a great many of them.) One evening in Washington, I walked from our business meeting to dinner at a nearby French restaurant with Lillian and Paul Freund, the legal scholar and a board member who didn't say much but whose sweet seriousness lent an air of agreeable gravity to any room he inhabited. Lillian asked Paul what plans he had for the summer. He said that he was going to be attending the Salzburg Seminar. "Oh, Paul," Lillian asked, "are they still run by the CIA?" Without skipping a beat, he replied: "I don't think so, Lillian, the food is quite poor."

Diana Trilling was something else. A friend had tipped me off that she had ceased any serious reading in 1965, and I came to believe it. She would not uncommonly suggest we get an article on a particular subject when such an article was in the current issue. Once she filled an entire ninety-minute meeting with complaints about a quite neutral article in the SCHOLAR about her deceased husband, Lionel, whom she referred to as L. T. (putting one in mind, of course, of Leo Tolstoy). At the end of the meeting, she resigned her membership on the board. Edward Shils tried to mollify her, but no one could have. He afterward told me that he regretted attempting to do so and wished he had said to her instead, "Madame, leave the public bath."

At its best, the editorial board resembled a fine little club of exceptional scholars: Arnaldo Momigliano, Glen Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Mary Lefkowitz, for example, handsomely represented the field of ancient history; S. Chandrasekhar, Freeman Dyson, and Jeremy Bernstein represented science. But easily the most valuable member was Edward Shils. Through his suggestions—sometimes made in meetings, more often in private—the scope of material in the magazine was widened, first to include many Oxbridge scholars, then many Continental ones. In some ways, he, Edward, was my silent co-editor; and, though I would often seek the articles he thought might be of interest, I rarely showed them to him before they were in print. Sometimes, after they did go into print, he would zing me on their not really being as good as they could have been. He functioned, Edward did, as an editorial conscience, all without emolument.

Soon after becoming editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, I was presented with a recently completed reader's survey, which I found comically baffling. Some readers thought there wasn't enough science in the magazine, others thought there was too much; some thought there was too much literary criticism, others felt that literary criticism should be at the heart of the magazine; some wanted more about movies and popular culture, others hoped we would dispense with popular culture altogether. It was at this point that I said the devil with these readers—and the devil with surveys. I decided that, in editing this magazine, my own motto would be "I interest myself." My view was that I was not a dull boy, and therefore what interested me would interest other intellectually lively people. If I was mistaken about this, it would be better to find it out early, be fired, and seek work in plumbing, where there was at least a chance to make a serious buck.

I decided not to print any movie criticism,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

almost no art criticism, and very little literary criticism that wasn't larger in its range than that produced by highly specialized English departments. If any article, in any discipline, seemed to me of possible interest only to specialists, I determined that it wasn't for us. I wasn't much interested in contemporary politics, or at least in reading about the subject in a quarterly, and it secretly pleased me that entire political administrations—Carter, Reagan, Bush—passed without the names of any of these presidents appearing in our pages.

During the course of my editorship, I became more and more interested in music, so I published a fair amount on that subject. I ran lots of memoirs. I loved to run offbeat pieces: an essay by a lawyer in Denver about his singing in an opera chorus; a consideration of the puppeteer Señor Wences; a visit to the Pittsburgh Pirates' spring training camp; an account of the comedy of being a professional lecturer. I had a long-standing interest in historiography—and a belief in Lewis Namier's maxim to the effect that long study of history teaches us how things do not happen—and I ran pieces on it and on historians whenever I could procure them. I had begun to teach at Northwestern University the year before I began my editorship, and my interest in teaching techniques and the influence of teachers led me to run a series of profiles of putatively great teachers, written by their students.

It pleased me to run the work of younger writers—I think I may have been the first to print Richard Rodriguez, and I published Shelby Steele very early in his career—but I also solicited manuscripts from a number of older writers from what I now think of as the strong generation: Oscar Handlin, Arnaldo Momigliano, Jacques Barzun, Paul Horgan, Sir William Haley, Paul Kristeller, Alexander Gerschenkron. I would occasionally get a letter from a freshly minted feminist telling me that she was canceling her subscription because I didn't run enough women writers. I generally answered such letters by remarking that I thought myself without prejudice in this matter, that I was only interested in getting the best possible copy into the magazine, and that I would run good writing produced by a hermaphroditic zebra.

When I began editing it, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR paid $250 for an article and $50 for a book review. It currently pays $500 for an article and between $100 and $200 for a book review—an improvement, but still not enough to set anyone up for that long weekend at the Ritz. The practical consequences of these low fees were that I couldn't pursue as contributors writers who earned their living through writing and I couldn't ask anyone to write an article that entailed travel or elaborate research. Consequently, many of our contributors turned out to be academics, or younger writers, or talented people for whom writing was not their first job.

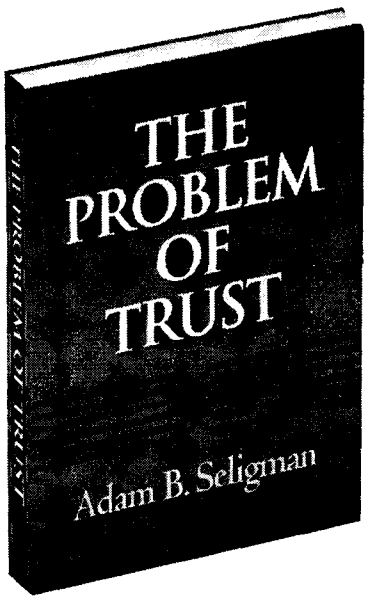
I wrote a great many letters soliciting material when I began editing the magazine. I wrote to all the still-extant writers that I admired. Some responded generously, some strangely. On the latter count, I recall a letter from F. W. Dupee, once of the Columbia English department, who always seemed to me a writer of great intellectual suavity. In response to a letter of solicitation, he said thank you very much, but he had simply ceased writing. As someone who planned never to stop writing, I found Dupee's letter astonishing.

Once THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR under my editorship got under way—after, say, three years—several excellent writers started sending things to me without my querying them. I took this to mean that the magazine had begun to hit its stride, to take on character, to represent something that attracted them. These writers either thought the magazine simpatico with their own views and interests or liked the company of its contributors. Sometimes they felt they had, somehow or other, written an AMERICAN SCHOLAR piece. H. L. Mencken, praised for discovering so much talent when editing *The American Mercury*, replied that all he did was open the mail. I began to understand what he meant.

Without planning many issues, I always had enough copy in the house to run what seemed to me a decent—and sometimes a bit better than decent—issue. Cyril Connolly used to say, of his years editing *Horizon*, that he was disappointed by each issue, "being given once a month the opportunity to produce a perfect number and every month failing, and just when despair sets in, being presented with one more chance." I was always surprised that an issue of our magazine had turned out as decently as it had, and I was not at all sure I would be able to do it again. I don't mean to imply that I am a better editor than Cyril

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Noteworthy Books



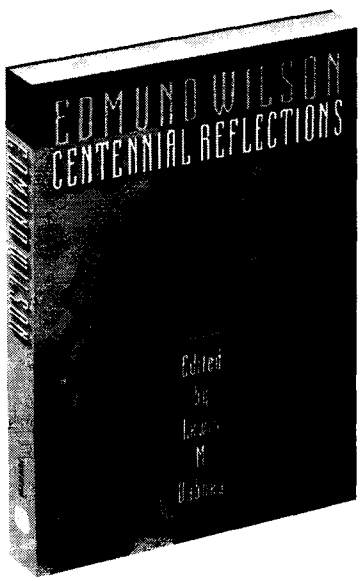
The Problem of Trust

Adam B. Seligman

In this sequel to his widely admired book, *The Idea of Civil Society,* Adam Seligman analyzes trust as a fundamental issue of our present social relationships. Setting his discussion in historical and intellectual context, Seligman asks whether trust—which many contemporary critics, from Robert Putnam through Francis Fukuyama, identify as essential in creating a cohesive society—can continue to serve this vital role.

"*The Problem of Trust* is a brilliant socio-historical study. . . . [It] not only illuminates the past transformation of trust, it also demonstrates perceptively why the problem of trust has become central to understanding the construction of social and political order in modern society."—Lucien Karpik, Ecole des Mines, Paris

Cloth $29.95 ISBN 0-691-01242-3



Edmund Wilson

Centennial Reflections

Edited by Lewis M. Dabney

Edmund Wilson influenced American literary culture from the early 1920s through the mid-1960s. This vibrant new collection emerges from symposia held in Wilson's centenary year, where prominent critics, literary journalists, and historians presented a variety of opinions about Wilson and his work. The book juxtaposes the voices of a younger generation of scholars in dialogue with writers of Wilson's generation, many of whom knew Wilson.

Contributors include Morris Dickstein, Jason Epstein, Barbara Epstein, David Bromwich, Jed Perl, Mark Krupnick, Neale Reinitz, Elizabeth Hardwick, Mary Meigs, Roger Straus, Alfred Kazin, Michael C. D. Macdonald, James A. Sanders, David Remnick, Daniel Aaron, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Randall Kennedy, Andrew Delbanco, Toni Morrison, Louis Menand, Paul Berman, and Sean Wilentz.

"Edmund Wilson . . . comes brilliantly to life in this wide-ranging collection of essays edited by his biographer, Lewis Dabney."—George Core, Editor, *The Sewanee Review*

Paper $12.95 ISBN 0-691-01671-2
Cloth $42.50 ISBN 0-691-01672-0

Princeton University Press

AVAILABLE AT FINE BOOKSTORES OR DIRECTLY FROM THE PUBLISHER: 800-777-4726
VISIT OUR WEBSITE: PUP.PRINCETON.EDU

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Connolly was during his ten-year editorship of *Horizon,* but only that, perhaps having lower standards than he, I took a mildly amazed view of the proceedings passing under my hand.

Connolly edited a monthly, I a quarterly. I came to like the distance from current events that a quarterly provides. One couldn't possibly keep up with the news in a quarterly, so why bother? A quarterly, too, allowed one to vary one's contributors and not, as in a weekly or even a monthly, to have to rely on the same small cadre of dependable but in time just slightly boring contributors. Although I used a small number of writers on several occasions, I don't think there was anything like a regular group of AMERICAN SCHOLAR contributors, and I found this variety pleasing.

I also came to like the magazine's being thought a little out of it. Edmund Wilson, in "A Literary Worker's Polonius," suggests that, on the matter of redesign, "the most that can be done with a magazine is to subject it to a sort of face-lifting process, which, though it may improve its look at long distance, only exposes it, on closer examination, in a more hideous state of senility." Soon after I became editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, I had its cover redesigned, though not its type or interior. I remember, when I showed the cover design I most liked to my editorial board, that William Styron, in criticism, remarked: "It looks like a Dutch philological journal." Ah, thought I, a Dutch philological journal, perfecto—just what is wanted.

Some magazines pride themselves on running the new and exciting, others on their eclecticism; I decided that the magazine I edited would attempt to sustain itself intellectually by invocation of the tradition of liberal arts learning—a tradition just then under serious attack in the universities. Through the choice of subjects and authors, I would try to re-animate the tradition, remind people of its strength and beauty, its charm and wit.

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, it delighted me to learn, soon acquired a reputation for being well written. I'm not sure how much this had to do with editing. In the beginning, I did rather more heavy editing than I later did; sometimes I even rewrote entire pieces. E. H. Gombrich once withdrew a lecture he had offered me because I asked him to change the few small lecture-like gestures at the beginning of the composition. I recently took large hunks of Freudian material out of a manuscript, causing its author to accuse me, good-naturedly, of performing a "sigmundectomy" on him—quite right, too. But I soon lost either the interest or the energy to re-work everything I ran in the magazine. Better, I felt, to acquire writers who were themselves attracted to careful prose style. The only editing standard I applied—to poems as well as to prose—was intelligibility. We would publish nothing we didn't understand ourselves.

The magazine's reputation for being well written may have had something to do with my strict proscription, if not outright purge, of certain words and phrases—quite a few words and phrases—from its pages. One of the first words I refused to permit was *lifestyle,* which, by 1974, was already well on its way to being a meaningless word. I recall attempting to remove it from an essay by Max Delbrück, the Nobel Prize-winning biologist, where Delbrück referred to "the lifestyle of a cell." "Professor Delbrück," I said to him over the phone, "I have been carrying on a little campaign against the word *lifestyle* and wonder if I can't persuade you to remove it from your excellent essay." "Aach," he said, in a strong Teutonic accent, "I hate it, too, but zis is how ze idiots in ze field refer to it."

I didn't allow *impact* in my pristine pages either, unless it referred to automobile crashes or dentistry. *Arguably* was excised; no flying *whatevers* were allowed, and most *indeeds* at the beginning of sentences were lopped away. *Experienced* as a verb didn't make the cut, and neither did *intriguing,* except when it referred to plotting and spying. Anything that smacked of the psychobabblous was out, which included the words *special, caring,* and *sharing.* Academic locutions took a beating: very few *in terms of* got by, fewer *as it weres,* and no *if you wills* whatsoever; the Latin abbreviations *i.e.* and *etc.* were sent to the showers.

More recently, nothing in our pages was *driven by* anything else; we also didn't cotton to *community* to describe all those groups—ethnic, artistic, sexual, and economic—that, obviously, were not in the least community-like. I removed scores of *incredibles.* Hocus-pocus! . . . and gone was *focus.* I closed out *closure.* Words and phrases of the journalistic moment—*values, chilling effects, process*—were similarly drummed out. Just for the sport of it,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I put back the hyphens in many words and phrases for the lovely tyrannous reason that I much preferred the look of *anti-democratic* to *antidemocratic* and *trance-like* to *trancelike*. Now that I shall no longer be editing a magazine, I think I shall have a sign made for my desk that reads: Responsible for My Prose Only.

I decided not to let any serious profanity, and no obscenity whatsoever, into the magazine, even though I myself might hold the record for using the ubiquitous F-word a greater number of times in the *Times Literary Supplement* than any other writer in that paper's history. (The occasion was a review of the first volume of the *Historical Dictionary of American Slang*.) Since profanity was becoming an increasing part of contemporary life—on television, in drama, in literature, in magazines—I felt it would be nice to declare our magazine a profanity-free zone. When I would occasionally cut profane words from a manuscript—it didn't happen all that often—I would comfort the author by telling him that he may count himself among the last writers censored in America and that there was real distinction in that.

In my twenty-three years as editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, the title Ms. never appeared in its pages. *Chair* or *chairperson* didn't make it either. I thought the first unpronounceable, the second patently silly. In choosing between the pronoun-clogging prose that political correctness requires—"He and she know that his and her values are unlikely to affect him and her"—and a confidently cadenced prose, I went for the latter every time, let the pronoun police complain as they may. I moved slowly, allowing plenty of time for bandwagons to pass, on changing from *Negro* to *black* to *African-American*. I was not big on *gay* either, and herein hangs a tale, and also a tail—nearly my own, actually.

One day a review came in over the transom—as unsolicited material has been called from the day when doors had transoms—concerning the scientific findings about the origins of homosexuality. It was written by two young men at MIT. It was no great shakes, but it was informative on a subject of endless complexity, and I accepted it. For some reason—good instincts, perhaps—I did not run the review right away. I finally held it so long that I wrote to its authors apologizing, saying that I could no longer run it. One of the authors wrote back, begging me to run the review, arguing that it was too late to find another place for it. I gave in, edited the review, among other things changing the word *gay* to *homosexual* throughout the manuscript. The other author wrote to tell me that I couldn't do that—that in certain phrases in the scientific literature on the subject (like my old friend the cell with his lifestyle) *gay* was the word that was used. We exchanged a few of what I thought were polite letters on the subject, agreed on a compromise arrangement—*homosexual* would be used sometimes, *gay* other times—and the review was published.

Not long afterward, the *Gay Community News* ran two articles about "Homophobia in Publishing"; in one of the articles, I turned out to be one of the prominent homophobes. The man I had corresponded with reported that I had given him a very rough time, first delaying publication of his review, then editing his manuscript in an unacceptable way. His article ended with the suggestion that readers of *Gay Community News* send in letters of protest of my behavior to Phi Beta Kappa, and more than a hundred people, some of them Phi Beta Kappa members, did.

This left an opening for those people on the Phi Beta Kappa Senate who did not approve of the magazine under my editorship to seek my dismissal. These were, for the most part, academics who had an investment in feminism, black history, and gay and lesbian studies. I had mostly treated these subjects in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR by ignoring them. I had asked a prominent feminist on the Phi Beta Kappa Senate to write for the magazine, adding only that I hoped she would be able to transcend feminist platitudes in doing so, but she never came forth with a contribution. We ran nothing about gay and lesbian studies and almost no black history. I did run a critical piece on multiculturalism and a strong denunciation of academic Marxism; occasionally, I ran a piece about some strangely off-center interpretation of an American literary classic.

The truth was, I found much in current academic life either boring or crazy, and I didn't want to devote much space to things in which I could not take any serious interest. I tended to view the occasional article that we ran on these strictly academic subjects as, in effect, opening the blinds to reveal the baboons at play, as if to say, "Betcha didn't think their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

behinds were quite so purple as that." I myself wrote an essay for the *Hudson Review* titled "The Academic Zoo." My condescension had to have left an unpleasant taste.

One day I received a letter, written on the stationery of a New York financial firm, informing me that my correspondent was a trustee of a private foundation. He wished me to know that the late founder of the foundation was a devoted reader of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR and that he gave thirty or so gift subscriptions to the magazine every year. Since he had cared so much for our magazine, the trustees thought that perhaps THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR should be the recipient of a grant, possibly to establish a prize in the founder's name. When I spoke with the man who had written to me about how much money the foundation had it in mind to give to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, he said rather casually, "Oh, something in the low seven figures." It took great control on my part not to invoke the names of the Lord in the world's three major religions.

In my discussions with the foundation, I mentioned that another prize was not what the world needed. There was, I said, no shortage of prizes, merely a shortage of worthy recipients for those now being awarded. What I proposed instead was that younger writers be paid decent fees (ten thousand dollars or so) to do assignments that would require considerable research, and possibly extensive travel, on such subjects as contemporary medical education or the training of diplomats. I hoped also to use part of the grant to find new readers. Were there more AMERICAN SCHOLAR readers in the country—perhaps another twenty or thirty thousand? It would have been splendid to try to find out without the fear of crushing our normal budget, and the foundation didn't object.

But it was never to happen. The generosity of the foundation was viewed by the magazine's enemies on the Phi Beta Kappa Senate as a right-wing plot to save the job of the editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. The annual interest on the two million dollars, which the foundation genuinely wished us to have, dangled temptingly for more than three years unused. A pity, a shame, a deep sadness, at least in my view. It might have been put to extremely happy uses.

Although THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR seemed to gain in prestige, although readers registered regular pleasure in it through correspondence and occasional surveys, I felt my time as editor running out. The small clique of people who despised THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR under my editorship were winning the day within the Senate of Phi Beta Kappa, which is, in the final analysis, the publisher of the magazine. Phi Beta Kappa's Senate, far from being representative of the organization at large, is almost wholly made up of academics, and in academic argument, I have noticed, the radicals almost always win, even though they rarely constitute a majority. Conservatives, dependably a minority, usually don't care enough to take a strong stand against them. Liberals, the poor darlings, though generally the majority, are terrified about seeming to be on the wrong side of things and so seek compromises that inevitably favor the radicals. The model here is the Russian Duma, with the minority of Bolsheviks cracking the moderation and ultimately the backs of the Mensheviks.

One of the liberal Phi Beta Kappa Senators, sensing that my days as editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR were running out, asked me how much longer I thought I might like to continue editing the magazine. I said that four more years, which would give me an even quarter of a century, would be sufficient. The Senate voted me two. I was fired, but, in a way characteristic of academic life, very slowly; I had two years to clean out my desk. As you read this, my editorship has fewer than thirty days to run.

I ought to be depressed about all this, but, somehow, I'm not. I have had a long and fine roll of the dice. I edited an intellectual quarterly without financial worry or intellectual interference for twenty-three years—and I am taking a final advantage of my freedom in this last essay. I shall miss the many readers about whom I have always professed not to be interested, and I shall miss the regular rhythm of writing my quarterly Aristides essays. I shall miss the challenge of coming up with a memorable closing for these essays. Perhaps I can be excused this final time for borrowing certain endings that, in my youth, always pleased me:

Good night, Mrs. Calabash, wherever you are. How sweet it is! Say good night, Gracie. Good night, Molly. Good night, all. With lotions of love. God bless. We're a little late, so good night, folks. And thanks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Historical Roots of Racism

BERNARD LEWIS

IN THE STATE OF NATURE, among wild creatures or primitive humans, a stranger, he who is "not one of us" or like us, is viewed at least with suspicion and more likely with hostility. He may be seen as a predator to be fled or as prey to be seized; or, if neither of these, as a rival, and therefore an enemy, to be fought. There are still societies at the present day of which the ideological or organizational antecedents are the wolf pack or the anthill. More civilized peoples introduced broader criteria, no longer simply based on the family, the clan, or the tribe—that is, on blood—but on other standards.

These are exemplified, for the Western world, by two lines of development: one through Greece and Rome, the other through Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In both of these, blood and kinship ceased to be the sole, or eventually even the main, basis of identity and loyalty. In the one, identity was defined by culture and later citizenship; in the other, by religion—that is, shared belief and worship. Parallel developments occurred in other civilizations in other parts of the world.

These new identities still left a barrier between the insider and the outsider. Those who do not share our culture are barbarians; those who do not share our religion are unbelievers; those who are not citizens of our city are aliens. But the crucial difference between these barriers and the more primitive barriers of blood and kin is that these are permeable. They can be crossed. By adopting our culture, the barbarian may become one of us. By accepting our religion, the unbeliever may become a believer. By joining our city, the alien may become a citizen.

✪ BERNARD LEWIS, Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies Emeritus at Princeton University, is the author, most recently, of *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2000 Years.* This essay is an expanded version of a paper presented at a seminar organized by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and held in Istanbul in January 1995.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There are degrees and levels of acceptance, which may differ. It took a while for the metics to become members of the Greek city; it took a long time for the privilege of Roman citizenship to be extended to all those under Roman rule. In the Hebrew Bible, the Jews are commanded in a number of places to deal justly and fairly with the stranger in their midst—to do him no injury, and to protect him from injury by others, at times linking him in this respect with the widow and the orphan. The context makes it clear that the stranger who lived in their midst was expected to abide by their laws and customs. The same was true of new citizens and residents of the Greek or Roman city.

The opportunity allowed to the outsider to become an insider marked an immense step forward from primitive savagery or even from barbarism towards civilization, but it still left an important difference intact and two important questions to be resolved.

The first is how to deal with the outsider who remains outside—external to our city as well as to our faith or culture. For most of recorded history the answer has usually been that we treat him with at least suspicion and often hostility. In this respect the responses of Christendom and Islam have been remarkably similar: Jihad, Crusade, Conversion. We convert him if we can; we fight him if we must. In other words we try in one way or another to absorb him. In different forms and disguises this attitude and the policies to which it gives rise have persisted until modern times.

Dealing with the outsider who remains outside is a comparatively simple matter. Far more difficult is the case of the outsider who becomes part of our community, whether by conquest or by immigration, and yet wishes to retain his otherness. How do we deal with the unbeliever who persists in his unbelief; the alien who accepts citizenship but does not fully share our identity and loyalties as we perceive them; the barbarian who wants to retain his barbarous customs, or at least customs that we regard as barbarous?

Until comparatively modern times, the position of the unassimilated, unconverted resident outsider varied between total rejection and limited tolerance. Some societies categorically refused him and tried to terminate his presence by expulsion, forced conversion, or sheer physical destruction. All three methods have precedents in history and have found practitioners in our own time. Other societies permitted him to stay and even to follow his own ways, speak his own language, practice his own religion, preserve his separate identity, but with certain limitations and restrictions.

In general, the rights accorded to such groups, which came to be known as minorities, were inferior to those of the dominant groups.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Minority rights varied considerably, from minimal to maximal forms. Some societies even allowed members of minorities to live full and useful lives as participant members of the society and loyal subjects of the state, though they did not share the basic beliefs of the majority and therefore did not enjoy full rights.

The wars of religion in Europe, which pitted Protestants against Catholics and led to enormous devastation, eventually produced a new idea, that of tolerance. Tolerance, and the associated idea of the separation of church and state, was a Christian solution to a Christian problem. The question had not arisen in the Islamic lands, where different religions and—a more searching test—different versions of the same religion had been able to live side by side in reasonable if intermittent concord. The idea of toleration was therefore not propounded and argued, perhaps because the fact of toleration was generally established and accepted as axiomatic or, in Islamic religious terms, as part of the divine order of things. The Qur'an (ii, 256) states explicitly, "there is no compulsion in religion," and this was usually interpreted to mean that those who follow a religion other than Islam, provided it meets certain criteria, may be allowed to practice that religion, subject to certain political, social, and above all fiscal disabilities. The pact between the Muslim state and the non-Muslim community that qualifies for this status and agrees to abide by it is in Arabic called the *dhimma*. A member of such a community is called *dhimmī*.

These disabilities were usually intended to exclude non-Muslims from political and military power, but in other respects, in the great periods of Islamic civilization such as the medieval caliphate and the Ottoman Empire, they did not prevent non-Muslims from contributing significantly to the social and economic and, at times, also the cultural and intellectual life of the society, and from serving the Muslim state in a variety of ways. There have been times and places in Islamic history when the non-Muslim minorities endured serious discrimination and repression, but genuine persecution in the form of forced conversion or expulsion, though not unknown, was rare. In general, the non-Muslim subjects of the Muslim state, which in practice in the Middle East and North Africa usually meant Jews and Christians, were reasonably safe as long as they were seen to respect the terms of the *dhimma* and did not attempt to exceed the status that it assigned to them. This kind of tolerance—enjoined by religion, enforced by law, endorsed by public opinion—worked well for centuries and ensured for non-Muslims and deviant Muslims in most Muslim lands a better life than was for long possible for outsiders and deviants in much of Christian Europe.

But the impact of the modern age changed all that. European

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

power created new pressures; European ideas aroused new expectations, and the two together undermined the old relationship and understanding between those who offered and those who accepted tolerance. In the era of democracy and human rights, tolerance was not enough, and the time-honored *dhimma* was abandoned by both sides. In much of the Muslim world, it has not yet been adequately replaced.

The new development had begun in Protestant Europe, particularly in the Netherlands and in England, in the late seventeenth century, when the idea of religious tolerance was extended to include the exercise of political rights—in other words, beyond tolerance to equal coexistence. The idea was eloquently expressed by John Locke in his *Letter concerning Toleration*, published in both Latin and English in 1689. In this he remarks that "neither Pagan nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion." This was also one of the basic principles that inspired the American Revolution. George Washington, the first President of the United States, explained in a letter written to a Jewish community leader in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1790 how the new republic embodied this principle:

> The citizens of the United States of America . . . all possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

In these words, Washington was pointing to the difference between tolerance on the one hand and coexistence with mutual respect on the other. Tolerance was good but insufficient, since it implied that a dominant group, however defined, permitted, for whatever reason, the extension to members of other groups some, though rarely if ever all, of the rights and privileges enjoyed by its own members. Coexistence means equality as—in Washington's phrase—an inherent natural right. To grant it is no merit, to withhold or limit it is an offense. Another of the fathers of the American republic, Thomas Jefferson, went even further and saw a positive merit in religious diversity. In matters of religion, he remarked: "the maxim of civil government" should be reversed and we should rather say "divided we stand, united we fall."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In practice, of course, few if any polities achieved this aim and many fell far short of it. The ideal of religious tolerance, first as a goal to be achieved and then as a stage to be surpassed, continued to inspire men and women of good will. But in the meantime, another kind of intolerance, based not on religion but on race, was spreading with devastating effect.

Racial antagonism represents a return to an earlier and more primitive conception of identity and difference. Language and culture, religion and allegiance can be changed, for the individual by personal choice, for the group by gradual assimilation. Race cannot. Hostility to those of other races has been endemic in human societies, stronger in the more backward, weaker in the more advanced. But racism in the modern sense, that is to say, ideologically rationalized and institutionally structured hostility, discrimination and persecution, appears in advanced rather than primitive societies. In our own day it has infected many cultures, including some previously immune.

Modern ideological racism in the Western world appears to derive from two historically recognizable sources. The first is the Christian reconquest and unification of the Iberian Peninsula, completed in 1492. First the Jews and then, a little later, the Muslims were given the choice of conversion, exile, or death. Many chose exile. Most Muslims, naturally, sought and found refuge in Muslim countries, principally in the adjoining states of North Africa. Many Jews, probably a majority among them, also sought refuge in the lands of Islam and especially in the Ottoman Empire. Some went to the Protestant north, a few even to less fanatical Catholic countries, including, ironically, the states of the church in Italy.

Many Jews and Muslims chose to remain in Spain and Portugal and, under duress, to forsake their religion rather than their homeland. But a forced conversion inevitably raises suspicion about its sincerity, especially among the enforcers. The Marrano and the Morisco, the crypto-Jew and the crypto-Muslim, became familiar figures in post-reconquest Christian Spain and Portugal, and great efforts were made, through the Inquisition and other agencies, to detect and extirpate them. For obvious reasons, the most likely suspects were the so-called "new Christians," those of Jewish or Moorish ancestry. So began the quest for what was called "purity of blood," by which alone, it was believed, the purity of the faith and of Christian society could be achieved and safeguarded. In this we may see the beginnings of anti-Semitism, properly so-called; that is to say, a new kind of hostility to Jews. This is no longer primarily theological or religious, and thus in principle removable by conversion. Instead, it is based, or claims to be based, on racial or ethnic differences. And since these are innate and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unalterable, the resulting suspicion and hostility are increased, not allayed, by conversion.

The Jew was not the only victim of these attitudes. There was also the Moor. This other kind of racism, originally directed against Spanish and, by extension, North African Muslims, received a vast new development with the expansion of European power into the other continents. One consequence of this was the enslavement and transportation of great numbers of black Africans to man the plantations of the New World. The enslavement of black Africans was not new. It had begun on a small scale in remote antiquity—there are ancient Egyptian friezes depicting light brown Egyptians leading haltered blacks into slavery. In the Middle Ages and after, slave raiders and slave traders brought a constant stream of black slaves into the Muslim lands of North Africa, the Middle East, and even farther away. Inevitably, the literature and folklore of these regions reflect prejudices against blacks and against other groups that differed in race, color, or otherwise from the dominant type.

But between this situation and that which prevailed in the European colonies, there were two important differences. The first was that in the Islamic world the slave population was recruited from all the different races and peoples whom the Muslims encountered on the frontiers of Islam, while in the Western world, from the time of the expansion onwards, the slave population was overwhelmingly black.

The second difference lay in the attitude to slavery. In the age of the European discoveries and expansion, slavery was still an established and accepted institution in virtually all the societies and civilizations of both the Old and the New Worlds. It also existed in Europe, though in Europe, unlike the other continents, slavery was of minor importance in the economic and social life of its peoples. It received a vast expansion and developed a virulent new strain from the unholy encounter of the enterprise and energy of the Europeans, the resources and potential riches of the New World, and the existing slave systems of the countries into which the Europeans came, in Africa and pre-Columbian America. The result was a revival of the institution of slavery and a worsening of the status of the slave.

This new slavery was organized and operated by Europeans and manned by the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere and, when they proved insufficient, new supplies imported from Africa. Colonial plantation slavery was not in itself new; it derived from old established practices of the regions concerned. But, as with other diseases, both social and medical, that crossed the Atlantic both ways in the Age of the Discoveries, slavery developed a new and deadly strain. In colonial slavery, the slave owners were all white; the slaves

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were all black. In the Old World, where slavery was often the result of a conquest, a racial distinction between the conquered who were enslaved and the conquerors who enslaved them was not unusual. But this distinction never attained the extension or the permanence of the New World slave systems.

The terrible paradox is that this new and deadly form of slavery developed precisely at the time when European civilization was becoming more and more concerned with such notions as the dignity of man, the freedom of the individual, the rights of the citizen, and similar matters. The Europe that enslaved so many Africans was not, as one might have expected, the semi-barbarous Europe of the Middle Ages for which, as for other societies, the enslavement of the outsider would have accorded perfectly well with its beliefs; it was the Western civilization of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and of the French and American Revolutions.

Individual men and women may commit all kinds of wickedness without compunction or regret, but societies like to believe that what they are doing is right; and if it is manifestly not right, they will make great efforts to find some moral justification for it. Earlier generations in various parts of the world had found justification for the enslavement of the Other in the Holy Writ and Holy Law of the various religions. It was the normal practice of nations that the conqueror enslaves the conquered: this is not just permitted, it is even prescribed by many systems. There were some who had problems with it. The ancient Jews, for example, conquered Canaan and, in accordance with common practice, enslaved the Canaanites, but the Jewish conscience was queasy about this and found comfort in the story of the curse of Ham, which gave divine authority for the enslavement of the conquered. In the biblical version, the curse of Ham (Genesis ix, 22–7) was limited to Canaan and his descendants. Later this interpretation was extended, first by Muslims and then by Christians, to cover the black peoples of Africa. This served precisely the same purpose. It was convenient to enslave them and it was more comfortable to believe that this was in accordance with God's will.

For enlightened Europe, these arguments no longer sufficed, and a new explanation was required that, in accordance with the spirit of the age, had to be expressed in scientific and philosophic, not in religious, terms. Such an explanation was found—or, more precisely, rediscovered and developed. Ancient writers from Aristotle onwards had sometimes expressed the view, usually in general rather than specific terms, that there are some races suited to civilization, others fit only for servitude. The idea was picked up by some medieval Muslim writers who noted the racial inferiority and unteachability of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

very white peoples of the north and the very black peoples of the south, both deviating, in opposite directions, from the light tan that was the civilized norm. But these, along with other examples of racial disdain in ancient and medieval literature, are no more than passing expressions of pride, spite, or wit and never achieved the status of an established and systematically applied doctrine.

This distinction was achieved in Europe where, for the first time, enslavement was justified, not as in other societies by the presumed barbarism or paganism of the enslaved, but by his innate racial inferiority. In this way, Western society was able to salve its conscience and defend slavery—no longer in religious terms as in the past, but in the philosophic and scientific language of the Enlightenment. Thus no less a hero of the Enlightenment than Voltaire could speak of the innate inferiority of blacks—and derive part of his income from a slave-trading enterprise based in Nantes. And a little later, neither the French Revolution nor the American Revolution did much to remedy this great social evil.

The abolition of slavery was also a uniquely Western enterprise. Alone among the slaveholders of the world, West Europeans and later Americans proceeded not just to the emancipation of their slaves but to the abolition of the institution of slavery—first in their home countries, then in their colonies, finally in the rest of the world wherever peoples of European culture lived or ruled. Like colonial slavery, abolition, too, was a uniquely Western phenomenon. And like colonial slavery, it bequeathed a multitude of frictions and tensions to the modern world.

If "scientific" racism served to justify first the enslavement and then the subordination of the liberated black, "scientific" anti-Semitism served a similar purpose in dealing with the Jew and especially with the emancipated Jew. In the late eighteenth and still more in the nineteenth century, religious discrimination and persecution were no longer acceptable to enlightened opinion in Western civilization and no longer sufficed to justify the penalization, still less the suppression, of religious minorities. But there were still many, especially in Continental Europe, who were profoundly offended by the participation of the Jew in "the civil rights of the Commonwealth." A new reason for excluding him was needed, and one was found. Wilhelm Marr, the inventor of the term *anti-Semitism*, explicitly rejected any kind of religious polemic and even said that he himself would defend the Jews against religious persecution. For him religion was unimportant; the real difference was race, and in racial terms, he argued, the Jew was an alien and an intruder in Europe and therefore a danger to European culture. Religion was superficial and unimportant, and the change of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

religion made no difference to this ultimate racial reality. In this way, it was possible to put a new and "scientific" gloss on ancient prejudice, with the further advantage that, unlike religious prejudice, it left the victim with no avenue of escape.

Tocqueville, in a letter to Gobineau, author of a famous book on the inequality of human races, remarked that if, heaven forfend, these ideas were ever accepted by a government, untold crimes would follow. In this, as in some of his other prophecies, Tocqueville was remarkably accurate.

Today "scientific" racism and its sub-variant "scientific" anti-Semitism are generally discredited in civilized countries and command no support except among extremist fringe groups—though, it must be noted, in times of strain and stress, such fringe groups can become disquietingly vocal and visible. At the present time they have become extremely vocal and visible in Iran, in many Arab countries, and in fundamentalist circles in Turkey. In these countries and elsewhere in the Islamic world, anti-Semitism, both in its old-style Christian version and in its modernized Nazi version, has been, so to speak, internalized and Islamized and has moved from the fringes to the center. Anti-Semitic tracts and fabrications are reissued or cited by the state-run media, in major newspapers, even in university-sponsored research and publications. In the general mood of revulsion against the West and its civilization, these appear to be the only Western ideas that are acceptable and indeed welcome. This upsurge of racist anti-Semitism among Muslims is, of course, in large measure a by-product of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is exacerbated by and in turn exacerbates that conflict; it may be hoped that if the peace process proceeds and succeeds, this alien transplant in the soil of Islam will wither away.

The primitive, one might even say, animal mistrust of the Other is part of our deepest instincts, and it has required centuries of civilization to tame and control it. In the longer perspective of history, the struggle to advance from primitive hostility through tolerance to the ultimate aim of coexistence with mutual respect has achieved some remarkable successes. It has also suffered some catastrophic failures, notably in our century, when primitive hatreds have been used—aroused, increased, and systematized—by theorists and practitioners from some of the most advanced of civilized societies, and what used to be a European disease has infected other continents. The battle against hatred is gaining support; it is not yet won.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Gardener

PATRICIA HOOPER

Since the phlox are dying,
and the daisies with their bright bodies
have shattered in the wind,

I go out among these last dancers,
cutting to the ground the withered asters,
the spent stalks of the lilies, the black rose;

and see them as they were in spring, the time
of eagerness and blossoms, knowing how
they will all sleep and return;

and sweep the dry leaves over them and see
the cold earth take them back as now
I know it is taking me

who have walked so long among them, so amazed,
so dazzled by their brightness I forgot
their distance, how of all

the chosen, all the fallen in the garden,
I was different: I alone
could not come again to the world.

✪ PATRICIA HOOPER's poems have appeared recently in *Poetry* and the *Atlantic Monthly*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A. J. Liebling, A Writist at Work

Old Days at *The New Yorker*

DAN PINCK

A FEW MONTHS AFTER I BEGAN WORKING AT *The New Yorker*, in the winter of 1949, I was asked by Leo Hofeller, who had administrative duties in the editorial department, if I'd like to work for Mr. Liebling. Without hesitation, I said that I would. "Then you ought to go upstairs right away and report for work," Mr. Hofeller said. "He likes you and he's looking forward to having you help him." I thanked Mr. Hofeller and walked up the stairway one flight to the twentieth floor. The door to Mr. Liebling's office was slightly open, but I knocked on the door anyway. Mr. Liebling said, "Come in." I opened the door fully. "Come in," he said again, and I walked into his office. "Reporting for duty, sir," I said. "Welcome, Dan," he said. "If I had another chair, I'd ask you to sit down." "That's all right," I said. "You've spoken to Leo Hofeller? And you'd like to help me?" "Yes, sir," I said. "That's good," he said. "I'm sure you'll do fine." "I hope so," I said. "When do you want me to start, Mr. Liebling?" "Now," he said. "Welcome aboard."

Mr. Liebling always wore a smile or a promise of one. Sitting behind his typewriter on a gray metal typing table, facing me, standing halfway between parade rest and at ease, he appeared to be two characters. One was a replica of Buddha, a small statue that I had bought in Peking in the fall of 1945; the other, a comfortably stout cellist, whose cowcatcher of a stomach compelled him to sit a fair distance from his typing table while, arms outstretched, he played the keys of his Royal typewriter. I thought he was overstuffed but not fat. Like many persons partially defined by girth, his feet, noticeably protruding on my side of the typing table, appeared to be stuffed into his plain, unpolished, black shoes, as though the shoes were at least one size too small. Mr. Liebling almost always wore a handsome, striped blue suit, democratically rumpled, whose jacket seemed incapable of being buttoned, or having ever been buttoned. He simply smiled. And

---

✪ DAN PINCK has written for, among other magazines, *Encounter, Foreign Intelligence Literary Scene,* and *Financial Times.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so did I. We looked serenely at each other, he behind his wire-rimmed glasses and I behind my tortoise shells. I enjoyed being in his presence.

"You'll work with me full-time," he said, matter-of-factly.

"Yes, sir," I said. I was happy to shed my mundane responsibilities on the magazine. I waited patiently for Mr. Liebling to tell me what he wanted me to do. Perhaps, I thought, he wanted me to find information for his "Wayward Press" columns.

"Do you know anything about *The Daily Worker*?" he said. "Have you ever read it?"

"No, sir," I said. "I know what it is. But that's the extent of my knowledge."

"Mine, too," Mr. Liebling said. "It's published by the American Communist Party."

"That's all I know about it," I said.

"It's a tabloid," he said, with disdain.

"Yes," I said. I knew that in his view all tabloids were lesser newspapers.

"I want you to do some research at their offices," Mr. Liebling said. "It will take you a while to dig it up. I'm not in any great hurry for it. But the sooner you canvass the newspaper, the better it will be. I don't know when I'll use the material. But I'd like to have it in hand as soon as it's reasonable."

"I'll do it right away," I said. "What do you want me to find out?"

"I'm not certain," he said. "I'll know it when I see it. But I'll set your compass as best I can. What I'm thinking about is how they cover ordinary topics in the United States; what kind of a Communist slant they invoke when reporting domestic happenings of a minor order." Mr. Liebling simply stopped, and continued looking at me.

I felt it was my turn to say something. "Such as?" I asked.

"Such as how they report on sports, if at all," he said. "You might call it trivia. Did *The Daily Worker* write about the Kinsey Report, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*? If they did, did they have a Communist slant? Did they comment on our first female ambassador, Eugenie Anderson, our new representative in Denmark? Did the newspaper report on Ingrid Bergman leaving her husband and her movie career for Roberto Rossellini? Did they mention our winning the Davis Cup? Or RCA announcing the invention of color television? All weighty stuff."

"Gossip," I said.

"News that isn't news," he said. "A millibar higher than gossip. But not much. Trivia. And that's not all. I'd like to know how they report on more important events, too. And I'd like you to compare their coverage with that of the *New York Times*. Précis is what I'd like, longer if you think it's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

necessary. And I'd like a stack of *The Daily Worker*s. And the original articles from the *Times* that you use in your comparisons."

I asked Mr. Liebling for a sheet or two of the yellow typing paper on which I could makes some notes. He gave me a few sheets. I wrote my notes and repeated them to him.

"Yes, that's it," he said. "Do you have a desk?"

"No, sir," I said.

"Well, I'll try to get you one. I might have to hassle it with Ross," he said. "But I'll find you a place to work, even if I have to put another table in my office. I had to hassle your appointment with Ross. I've been trying to get a research assistant for a long time. He said you were doing a fine job running errands for him."

"Yes," I said. "I take galleys to his apartment on Park Avenue in the morning, and after he comes into the office before lunch, I go downstairs and buy a half-pint of cream and a package of cheese crackers for his lunch. That's his everyday lunch. He says it's for his ulcers."

"I wish I had that diet," Mr. Liebling said. "Yesterday for lunch I had half a roasted chicken followed by a sirloin. I don't know why Ross hasn't given me ulcers or worse."

"If you like, I'll buy you a package of cheese crackers each day for your lunch," I said. I didn't yet know what a great feeder he was.

"No, thanks," he said, glumly. Then he said, "Give me your expenses, with the receipts, and I'll pass them along. You might even be reimbursed. This is a tight ship." I hadn't considered the possibility that my salary in my new job might be increased. I was earning thirty-two dollars a week and sleeping in a seven-dollar-a-week hall bedroom. I was eating less well than I had during the war, behind enemy lines. Mr. Liebling read my mind. "I'll see if I can get you a raise," he said. "Don't count on it."

Mr. Liebling looked at the sheet of paper in his typewriter, signifying the end of our meeting. I had many questions to ask him, but I thought better of it. I simply thanked him and said I'd start working at *The Daily Worker* in the afternoon.

I left his office and went downstairs. I asked an office boy to buy Mr. Ross's lunch. I looked up the address of the Communist newspaper, took a legal tablet in an envelope, and headed out of the office. I went up to Fifth Avenue and caught a bus downtown. On the way, I thought about how best to go about my work. The Red Scare was getting under way, propelled by the House Un-American Activities Committee, and the perjury indictment of Alger Hiss and his confrontations in court with Whittaker Chambers. Although the situation was not yet as scary as it would soon become (I'd recently heard from a friend that a friend of his, an old China hand in the Department of State, had been visited by an FBI agent in his office next to the White

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

House. The FBI agent queried him because an unnamed person had said he had seen books on the Russian ballet in his house; the agent queried him about his interests in Russia), I suspected that the FBI had *The Daily Worker* office under surveillance. The FBI probably took photographs clandestinely of everyone who entered or left the newspaper. I had qualms about visiting the office; but I intended to carry out my assignment. I wondered if I should have a cover story. I knew I wouldn't say that I was from *The New Yorker*, doing research for A. J. Liebling. I figured that I would improvise an answer if anyone asked me what I was doing and why I wanted to do research in their building.

I got off the bus at Twelfth Street, crossed Fifth Avenue, and walked east on Thirteenth Street to find the newspaper office at number 50. I walked by the office, two blocks east of Fifth Avenue, and looked around: two or three persons were on the street, not much was happening, and no one entered or left the office building. I looked across the street at two or three houses and a small apartment house that faced the *The Daily Worker* building, which had no sign on the front, except the street number. If the FBI had the building under surveillance, I imagined that their agents were in an apartment or a house across the street. I walked back to the newspaper office, with my head turned toward it. If I were going to be photographed, they'd get the back of my head. I didn't figure how I'd leave the building with my face partially hidden.

It was a nondescript black building of no architectural distinction. No one would ever notice it. I walked inside. The lobby was empty. A few doors, each one closed, bounded the lobby. I walked to a door, knocked, and waited for someone to answer. No one did. I repeated this exercise at each door. No response. I turned the knob on one door. It was locked. I repeated this at the other doors. All of them were locked. What to do? An antique cage elevator was beside a staircase. I opened the elevator door, closed it manually, and pressed the button for the second floor.

Up one floor and out: a stout woman who resembled a balustrade in a black dress marched across the open entrance to what appeared to be a large room. I walked in. Whether it was an editorial or a business office, I couldn't tell. No one sitting at a desk looked up when I entered. In a far corner, I noted several piles of newspapers. Farther away, several men were seated at their desks, either reading newspapers or typing. I assumed that these men were reporters or editors and that they represented the editorial department. I walked to the nearest man, who was reading a copy of the *Daily News*. He looked up at me. I said, "Hello." He said, "Huh." "Good afternoon," I said. "Huh," he said. I told him I'd like to look at some newspapers, no more than two months old. He raised his arm above his head, flipped his forefinger in the direction of the back

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the room. "Over there," he said, and went back to reading his newspaper. I thanked him and walked to where I had noticed rows of *Daily Workers* against the wall. I looked at the publication dates; they followed no order.

The woman in black led me to an area of file cabinets and shelves with *Daily Workers* on them. She told me I could take whatever I wanted, and she showed me a desk where I could sit and read. I thanked her, cased the files, and pulled out about forty newspapers and went to the desk. "You let me know if you need any help," she said, and left.

I began reading the Communist newspaper. It was hectic reading, with many references to occurrences in the United States, many of them skewed either at the beginning or end as to what the writer claimed were progressive counterpoints in the USSR. The makeup of the newspaper wasn't bad; your eye didn't get lost in advertisements for leather hernia belts and cheap suits with two pairs of pants, as it did in the popular New York tabloids. Charitably and predictably, you'd call it biased and way off base; but that was its purpose, to sling the Party line, whatever it happened to be.

The front page, beneath the wide-body masthead, *The Daily Worker*, noted that it was published by The Freedom of the Press Company, Inc., a name sure to appeal to Mr. Liebling. Also, up top, was the fact that the issue of the newspaper was eleven pages in length. I did not see how a newspaper could be anything but an even number of pages long. I looked at the back page; it had the same masthead as the front page; it was more of a broadside than the front page. It had no number on it. *The Daily Worker* cost five cents.

The Daily Worker was at least as well written as most of the New York newspapers; but what it reported was so politically slanted or skewed that I didn't scan for sense, only for the curious and outlandish. I quickly decided that if the American Communist Party considered that the support of such a sad newspaper was an integral part of their plan to take over the United States, then we had nothing to fear from the Party's membership or the newspaper's readers.

I found a few articles that seemed to fit Mr. Liebling's directive: Jackie Robinson, a Negro shortstop fighting American racism and the New York Yankees, was voted the Most Valuable Player in the 1949 World Series, despite the defeat of Robinson's team, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Battling beanballs and racism on the field and in the stands, Robinson batted a league-leading .342 for the season. Another brief article in an earlier edition of *The Daily Worker* reported that Jackie Robinson refuted the singer Paul Robeson, who said that American Negroes will never fight communism. Robinson said they would. This article illustrated how an ideological double play served the news-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paper's editorial policy. You can be both out and safe in the same ballpark. A summer issue reported, under the headline "The Negro Stars Here Today," that the New York Cubans were going play a baseball team from Baltimore in a Negro American League game.

The newspaper's sports coverage also noted Jake La Motta's KO of Marcel Cerdan to capture the middleweight title and, several months later, the death of Cerdan in a plane crash in the Azores. Given Mr. Liebling's devotion to the study of boxing, I thought the articles on Cerdan would please him. And I wondered what, if any, connection Cerdan had to a communist readership. I attributed it to the quirky hobby of an editor.

The articles were short, and by reading only the heads on the articles, I could determine the context of the newspaper's philosophy. "Fight Legal Lynching"; "Free China From The Koumintang"; "Anti-Fascists Mourn Death of Dimitroz All Over The World"; "Mass Demonstration Against NLRB"; "3 EAM Leaders Die"; "Cheering Crowds Hail Mao As China Establishes People's Republic"; "East Germany Establishes Communist Government." There was a column titled "Press Report," with one-paragraph items from the *Herald Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the *Daily News*, and the *Mirror*. Several issues were about the start of the Korean War, under the headline "Rightest Attack Repelled in Korea." The United States and South Korea were the rightists, of course.

I thought I'd made a good start. I reviewed what I'd found and made some notes on my legal pad. Even though I'd been playing pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey in my research, I'd uncovered a lot of tidbits for Mr. Liebling. After I finished writing, I got up and selected another batch of newspapers, maybe forty or fifty, going back four or five months. I found more items that I thought were appropriate. I wanted to clip items for Mr. Liebling, but I felt that it would be unseemly to do it there. I decided to buy the newspapers and take them with me.

About six o'clock, I looked for the woman in black to tell her I'd like to buy some *Daily Worker*s. I found her behind a file cabinet on the other side of the room. I told her what I wanted. "You don't have to buy them," she said. "But you can contribute five dollars, if you want to." I gave her a five-dollar bill, and she said, "Thank you. You can come here anytime. We're glad to help you. My name's Mary." She held out her hand, I shook it and said, "My name's George and I thank you." She offered to wrap my newspapers and I accepted. She wrapped them in brown wrapping paper, gave the package to me, and we said good-bye to each other.

With my accordion of newspapers, I left *The Daily Worker* and walked back to Fifth Avenue, having forgotten that the FBI's cameras had probably frontally captured me. I decided to have dinner at the Blue Mill Tavern in Greenwich Village, a comfortable place where you ordered off a blackboard menu that your waiter brought to the table. On paydays, I often ate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there; and now I ordered my usual, a steak and French fried potatoes. I considered reading one of my newspapers during dinner, but I didn't. I wasn't about to have other diners watching me read *The Daily Worker.* Instead, I read the *New York Times,* which I took from a table near mine.

After dinner, I went back to *The New Yorker,* on Forty-third Street, and went up to the twentieth floor to a windowless room in the middle of the floor, around the corner from Mr. Liebling's office. The room was used by itinerant staff writers, most of whom worked odd hours. Three desks and three typewriters were its only contents. Usually, at any time of the day or night, one or two desks were vacant. I went to the desk where Niccolo Tucci sat, when he decided he needed to work at the magazine.

I opened my package of *Daily Worker*s and began correlating my notes with the pertinent issue and article. In two hours, I'd accumulated a lot of information. I decided to keep at it until I finished with the newspaper. I then decided to compare some of the coverage of a few events with that of the *New York Times.* I listed the dates of the newspaper that I wanted and walked over to the *Times* to collect them. Even though it was late, I was given the issues that I wanted; and I walked back to our offices. When I got back, Richard Rovere, then the magazine's Washington correspondent, was sitting at a desk in the large room.

Rovere spent most of the week in Washington; but he came back to New York to write his "Letter from Washington" column. He was enveloped in cigarette smoke and typed without pausing to say hello. I went to work. About two o'clock, he stopped typing and asked me if I'd like to go out for some food. It was a good time to stop; I accepted; and we walked over to Sixth Avenue, looking for an open cafeteria. He asked me what I was doing, and I told him. I asked him what was happening in Washington and he told me. After coffee, he said he was through for the day and left. He looked dead beat. I went back to work on my project, comparing the coverage of the two newspapers. About six o'clock in the morning, I'd done as much as I could do and stopped. It was too late to go home, so I went out for breakfast and walked the awakening streets, pleased with my good fortune at working for A. J. Liebling.

When I returned to the office, I reviewed my work and cleaned up my copy. I would show it to Mr. Liebling when he came in, after lunch. I hoped he would like what I'd done.

When he came in, I went to his office and knocked on the slightly open door. "Come in," he said, and I walked in. "How's it going, son?" he said. I said that I'd got some information and I placed my written-up notes and the newspapers on his desk. "My God," he said. "What have you got here?" I said I'd spent the afternoon at *The Daily Worker* and the night here at the office putting my research together. "Let

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me look at this," he said, and he began going through my notes and the marked newspapers. After about fifteen minutes, he said, "This is great. Just what I want. Well done. I may be curious about more information from *The Daily Worker*, but I doubt it. I don't expect you to work all night on my assignments." "When I started," I said, "I decided, after I got into it, that I might as well keep at it." Mr. Liebling smiled and said, "You're a persistent digger after information, Dan. This is a fine beginning."

When some of the information I gave him appeared about five weeks later in a "Wayward Press" piece on the start of the Korean War, I was exhilarated. I felt as though I were on my way, even though I had no idea where that way might be and even though my contribution was only a few wayward thoughts. I had contributed to the work of one of our leading journalists. My new job suited me fine.

I've long forgotten the name of the person who said, apropos of the dismay at meeting a writer whose works one admires, "It's like wanting to meet the goose because you liked the paté." A. J. Liebling didn't belong in this category. Not at all. Quite the opposite, in fact: I had read some of Liebling's wartime pieces in the pony editions of *The New Yorker*, which were printed on cheap paper, without advertisements. The majority of them had twenty-six pages, including the back covers, which had a cartoon on them. They were printed for overseas troops during the Second World War and for about a year after. *Time* and *Newsweek* were also published in pony editions, size 6 1/8-by-8 5/8 inches. I liked Liebling's reportage on the war from North Africa, from England, and from France. He was a frontline reporter; sometimes, he was ahead of the front line, and he participated in many skirmishes. Although he wrote as a civilized spectator, he was part of the action, and much of what he described was never reported in the newspapers or newsmagazines. He was a writer and a stylist who delighted in lofting broadsides at pretentious and incompetent generals, in much the same manner in which he demolished newspaper publishers after the war. Because there were brigades in both professions, he never lacked targets. Since I had served in dangerous places during the war and as a starting-out newspaper reporter after the war, his targets were my favorites, too. In one of his early "Wayward Press" columns, published in a spring pony edition, after the war's end, he cooked a deadly wrap-up of the obituaries from many newspapers on the death of Joseph Medill Patterson, publisher of the *Daily News* in New York. "As I write this piece, the stricken tabloid seems to have recovered its aplomb, if not its sense of direction," Liebling said. By the time he finished his own adroit eulogy of Patterson and his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

newspaper, no one with an IQ above eighty-five would be seen even carrying a copy of the *Daily News.*

What I mean to say is that, having met A. J. Liebling a few years after first becoming acquainted with him in print, I found him to be exceptionally generous and sensitive. And my opinion of him and his work steadily increases over the years. His books define his spirit. I rely on him as an intimate and reliable companion. I'm never disappointed. I learn more and more about him as time passes. As I continue to read him and read about him, the uncovering of new knowledge illuminates varying aspects of my association with him years ago on *The New Yorker.*

I spent much time with Mr. Liebling. In the afternoons, if he wanted a break from writing or thinking about writing, he'd invite me to his office. Any topic was fair game. Often we talked about the war and about newspapers. And especially about Harold Ross's querulousness.

Mr. Liebling breathed journalism and he devoured newspapers. Sometimes his desk was covered with out-of-town newspapers from Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Paris, London, Atlanta, Newark, Kansas City. Interspersed with major dailies were unsightly tabloids with screaming headlines. He could run through a newspaper in less than five minutes. If an article interested him, he'd clip the article, fold it, and put it on a bookshelf behind his desk. Often, when he came in after lunch, his coat pockets bulged with clippings from newspapers that he had read at home in the morning. He seemed to play with his clippings as a card shark does with a deck of cards.

One afternoon, Mr. Liebling dealt the first conversational card: "Dan, what do you know about recoilless rifles?" "Nothing at all," I said. "I had two .45s and a carbine. I've shot a tommy gun on a practice range, in Michigan." Mr. Liebling said, "I was with some fellows who had a 57-millimetre gun that weighed forty-five pounds. They carried it with them in the field artillery. They had to stay clear of the breech when they fired it to avoid a rearward blast." "That's a lot of weight to carry," I said dumbly. "The guns froze up in the Ardennes, if they had any oil on them." He waited for me to respond. I didn't. The opening was a draw.

I led next, with: "I recently read in an issue that I took from the magazine files about your admiration of Omar Bradley and your bashing of General Montgomery."

Mr. Liebling looked interested. The game was revitalized. "The former was an exceptional person, the latter a pompous horse's ass who wore elevator shoes. I think Bradley was our most decisive general and did more than any other general in the field to beat the Germans. Bradley was a great man and never talked up or down or sideways to any man. I knew him in Africa and I knew him in Europe. He's the best."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And now he's the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs," I said.

"He's Truman's best appointment," Mr. Liebling said.

"You knew him well," I said. "He'd make a good profile."

"Not a bad idea," Mr. Liebling said. "We rarely do profiles of anyone who doesn't have a base in New York. Ross doesn't like to do foreigners. What's Ross up to?"

"Being his usual charming self," I said. "Yesterday I heard him complaining about Joseph Wechsberg. He said he was a rotten writer, most of his stuff had to be rewritten and edited beyond reasonableness; but that we ought to keep publishing him, because you never could tell when he might contribute a really good piece."

"Sounds reasonable," Mr. Liebling said. "Ross hassles almost everyone. Sometimes he makes a sensible comment on my stuff. I used to save his queries, because they were so oddball. But now I mostly throw them away. Gardner Botsford is a much better editor. Ross plays the role of a warden on this magazine."

"Yesterday, I got in the elevator with Ross and William Shawn, just the three of us," I said. "When we reached the nineteenth floor and the elevator door opened, neither one would leave the elevator first. Shawn was adamant that Ross and I leave first. Finally, Ross left the elevator first and turned to the right, aiming for his office. He muttered a four-letter word that is verboten in the magazine."

"And you left after Ross?"

"Yes. Shawn put his arm on my back and pushed me out ahead of him," I said.

"That's Shawn," Mr. Liebling said. "He never goes through a door first. Superstitious compulsion. I'm a large person for a little person to push through a doorway. But he does that to me, too. I refrain from pushing him. Do you have any more Ross tidbits?"

"Well," I said, "Ross received a letter from President Truman, thanking him for making him the magazine's only honorary subscriber. The letter was marked personal and I have a copy of it." I showed Mr. Liebling the copy. He read it and said, "I like the way you pick up information. You're a good sleuth. Any more Ross?"

"When I worked at a newspaper in Virginia, covering the police department, I often picked up important information from the wastepaper baskets. It's a habit. But the letter didn't come from a wastepaper basket," I said.

I refrained from asking Mr. Liebling how he got his information. I knew he read newspapers, of course, and that he spent his mornings at home. But I never saw him typing from notes. When and how he got around, I didn't know. He seemed to have his files in his head, and when he was typing he was seldom bothered by the clutter of reference notes or books. He was rather like a good jazz musician, one of Eddie Condon's group

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that I often visited in Greenwich Village. As they played, so Liebling wrote—backstopped by so much knowledge that he could forget technique and simply write by instinct. Call it improvisation. As a reporter, Mr. Liebling had worked on four or five newspapers before he joined *The New Yorker* in 1935, including the Concord, New Hampshire *Monitor*, the Providence *Journal* and *Evening Bulletin*, and several New York newspapers. He got around but I didn't have the vaguest idea of when.

"Son," he said, "would you mind collecting any data you can find on Joseph Medill Patterson?"

"You wrote a "Wayward Pressman" on him," I said. "Rounding up his obituaries. You buried him, but good."

For Mr. Liebling, the scent of a dead publisher or a dying newspaper brought him up sharply, like Sherlock Holmes setting out on a new case from 221B Baker Street. His special venom was reserved for William Randolph Hearst, Roy Howard, Frank Munsey, Col. Robert R. McCormick, Joseph Medill Patterson, and their newspapers. The fact that publishers died only once was a source of great regret to Mr. Liebling, although a subsequent death in their family of newspapers roused him to the chase again.

"Yes. I gave him a royal send-off."

"So I'll try to find other information," I said. "Anything?"

"Anything," Mr. Liebling said. "Anywhere. Try your wastebasket routine. Put Colonel McCormick in the mix as well."

How did Liebling do it? I mean how did he go about gathering information for his pieces and his longer profiles? I think I knew what he did during the daylight hours. He generally worked at home in the mornings, reading newspapers. (In a "Wayward Press" column, "No Papers," published in the magazine on July 28, 1945, following a strike during which New Yorkers were deprived of their newspapers for seventeen days, he said, "Since I got back to this country from Europe last winter, I have spent from one to three hours a day looking at them.") He came to the office before lunch, in time to read another newspaper or two and to find a partner for lunch. In the afternoon, he sat at his typewriter for two or three hours. It seemed to be an orderly workday. But when did he gather information? At night? At lunch? On weekends? The limited amount of information that I found for him counted for no more than five percent, and usually less than that, of the factual data that he used in his articles.

Undoubtedly he carried in the library of his mind a generous investment of knowledge that buttressed whatever new information he needed that he somehow accumulated, in a mysterious fashion. In the written record of his life (a grandly discursive but an intimately detailed perspective gained from a conversational acquaintance

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with his books), there are occasional pennons signaling his manner of work as a journalist. In his first book of reminiscences about the Second World War, *The Road Back to Paris*, published in 1944, Liebling describes what he didn't do journalistically in covering American crews flying B-17s from bases in England: "I never really interviewed anybody, just lived around the place and learned by osmosis, until I sometimes thought of myself as a redundant member of the group, a goldbricker nobody had yet caught up with." In another book, about his experiences in wartime France (he entered France on D-Day Plus Three and was one of the first war correspondents to enter Paris), Liebling said he picked up information "walking about." The point is I never saw him working as a journalist, doing the things that most journalists do, working the phone, taking notes, setting up interviews—nothing except collecting newspaper clippings that he filed in his coat pockets.

I've no doubt that Liebling, in fact, did know the answers to many of the questions he asked in interviews. On several occasions in which Liebling invited me to join him in talking to persons from whom he sought information, he seldom asked questions. What he did was cast unfinished sentences to the person to whom he was talking, hoping to reel in some unexpected information. But, above all, Liebling had conversations with persons; he did not interview them, in any formal way. Buddha-like, he just sat there, ruminating, reflective, as though he were the person being interviewed and not the other way around.

One of the canons of journalism that I'd been taught on newspapers before I joined *The New Yorker* was that you reported in your article precisely what the interviewee said, in his words, his syntax, his diction. You did not make up things for him to say, and you reported his errors, his grammatical and factual mistakes, as though they were the gospel. To ascribe words of your choosing to anyone was morally wrong. I believed it and I subscribed to this dictum. If the interviewee said, as sports figures often do, "The ball was hit between I and he," that's exactly the way you wrote it. You weren't a proper journalist if you broke this commandment of journalism.

Some months after I joined the magazine, I began submitting, from time to time, articles for the "Talk of the Town" section. Invariably, they went up the editorial ladder, from one editor to another, before they were rejected with a comment, such as "Nice try. Try again." I gave a squad of rejected pieces to Liebling and asked him if he'd mind commenting on them. Of course, he said he would. And in time he discussed the articles with me. "These people sound kind of dull," he said, in reference to the comments of persons whom I interviewed. "But that's exactly what they said," I said. "Ah," Mr. Liebling said, "that's your mistake." "Mistake?" I said. "Yes. Mistake," he said. "But they were dull," I said. Mr. Liebling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked thoughtfully at me, and said, "But they don't have to be. Let me tell you about my own experience. When I left the world of newspapers for the world of Harold Ross, I had any number of difficulties in having my work accepted. For a lot of reasons: my work was thin; it was not especially insightful; and the franchise I had on newspapers did not accommodate the spirit of adventure that Ross sought for his magazine. My early directions were stilted and stiff. I was missing the mark. And most of what I wrote, including 'Talk' items, was rejected. After a time, I loosened up. When I wrote my profile of Father Devine, I was dealing with interesting persons, him himself and the members of his flock. I took copious notes and quotations. But when I wrote my profile, I reached a point where I simply recreated the man and his minions and I mined my information in my imagination. I was accurate but not literal. Thereafter, I relied on my reflexes and instincts and I had no great problem. What I'm saying is that when I decided not to think as a journalist, my writing changed and my early problems disappeared. I asked a writer here about reporting accurately for 'Talk.' He surprised me by saying that no one ever complained to him or to any other 'Talk' reporter whom he knew about being misquoted. In short, as long as you didn't veer from the truth or meaning of what a person told you, you could put his comments in your own words, so to speak." Liebling said that it shocked him to learn this. But he got over it, and no one ever complained. He also advised me to survey the terrain while collecting information for an article and to head in the opposite direction from other reporters.

Over the years, Liebling's reputation among journalists exceeded even their fondness of his press criticism when he was alive. He was the envy of every journalist because he was able to tear into publishers and the less courageous attributes of their newspapers. Newspapers, as we know too well, manage to give and receive journalistic awards to fit every category, with the exception of the best obituary, and the size of readership. But they do not give annual awards for press criticism, mainly because they can't stand it and there's very little of it. Ombudsmen fill a self-serving role. When investigative journalists started an organization after Watergate, they made Liebling their patron saint. And over the years, as I dipped into his press criticism, I began having second thoughts about designating him a journalist simply because he often wrote in *The New Yorker* about newspapers.

Liebling was no journalist. What he was was an essayist of the first order: in the style, tone, wit, and scope of the learned, imaginative ingredients he put in the bouillabaisse of his pieces. Even the titles of his pieces are significant clues that he was sailing on an essayistic tack: "How

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to Learn Nothing," "Two Pounds for a Dime," "Mr. Capone and Other Primates," "Aspirins for Atoms," "Down with Babushkas!" "Antipenultimatum," "The Indian Pathologist," "Who Killed the Monkey?," "Potemkin Rides Again," "My Name in Big Letters," and "My Professional Career Ends" herald the essayist, not the journalist. And his observations (the warp) camouflage the facts (the woof) in his critical articles. For example, some sayings of Mr. Liebling: "It was that way with the papers. I simply hadn't remembered how bad some of them were, how indifferent the others, and how overstuffed all of them were with blobs of type that you half read only because they happened to be in front of your eyes." Again: "What I'd like to recommend is to get out large newspapers only on days when there is a lot of news, supplementing them on the intervening days with small bulletins containing such essential items as race charts, market reports, and weather information. This will seem to some a radical solution." And again: "Within this framework Providence was a lovely place to work in. There was nothing you could do about anything, but then nothing was so bad that you felt a burning urge to do anything about it. The city has Brown, a good university, and a lot of people who read books and talk about them."

To consider Liebling a journalist is like labeling Virginia Woolf a journalist because she wrote so many articles and reviews for newspapers and periodicals. Virginia Woolf described this work of hers as "journalizing freely."

Let me add a curiosity. An old journalistic rule is to write short paragraphs, and a corollary is to write the paragraphs in descending order of importance. The first paragraph contains, in eighty words or less, the most important news or facts, and the less important news, in order of priority, follows in succeeding paragraphs. Perhaps because he was so delighted to be removed from the strictures of a newspaper editor's editing, Liebling ranged quite the other way in many of his opening, and subsequent, paragraphs. Liebling wrote some of the longest paragraphs in *The New Yorker*. He'd give Henry James a run. In a "Wayward Pressman," "No Papers," he leads off with a first paragraph of two hundred and seventy-eight words. The second paragraph, a tape-measure job, has more than three hundred and fifty. Similar statistics show up in many other articles. For Liebling, unlike your standard journalist, a first paragraph often was a batting-practice swing, a way for him to get a line on what he wanted to say and what kind of pitch he wanted to hit.

My days were spent culling newspapers in the library—or morgue, as it was called by journalists—at various New York newspapers, and in reading books and looking up old newspapers at the New

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

York Public Library. I enjoyed myself and I was learning all kinds of incidental information for Mr. Liebling. In time, I had a long menu of Mr. Liebling's requests, all of which I fulfilled. He was pleased with my work. To go to a newspaper office and be given entry to the library, all I needed to say was that I was doing some work for A. J. Liebling, and I was provided with everything I wanted to see.

One day I told Mr. Liebling that some staff writers were telling me their personal problems and I was uncomfortable about it. "This calls for lunch," he said. "Tomorrow, let's go to Costello's." The next day, we walked to Costello's. On the way to Third Avenue, Mr. Liebling added a few more items for me to track and he talked about boxing, which he had done in college, at Dartmouth, and occasionally afterward. He walked surprisingly nimbly for a stout man. I had never been to Costello's. The headwaiter greeted him effusively and led us to a table, in full view of James Thurber's drawings on a wall. Mr. Liebling and I ordered a modest meal, preceded by a single malt. I had never had a single malt; but when Mr. Liebling ordered one, I did, too. "So you've discovered how many troubled persons there are?" Mr. Liebling said, without feinting in preliminary conversation. "Yes," I said. "I'm glad to help. But I don't enjoy it. And I'm curious why there seem to be men here who have such a hard time."

"It's the nature of the beast," Mr. Liebling said. "*The New Yorker* is designed to keep people off balance and perturbed. We're competing against one another, although it doesn't appear that way. Ross is a nervous person and a nervous-making person. He seldom knows exactly what he's looking for, and this translates into an environment in which the staff seldom knows, or feels confident enough to approach their tasks with equanimity. And we're all worrying about money all the time, except those few with independent incomes. We have the best job in the world for anyone in our craft, but most of us are on the cusp of being despondent. The rules are changed every day. Maybe it's all conditioned by Ross's ulcers. In the Navy, there are two kinds of ships, tight ships and happy ships. This is a tight ship."

"But Ross hands out praise," I said. I had read enough of his memoranda to know that.

"But you never know when you aren't going to satisfy him," Mr. Liebling said. "You always think you know him, and some of us think we know him better than others, but he confounds us all. We all want to satisfy him. But he rarely pleases us. I suppose he treats us as though we were his children. We don't have tenure."

I mentioned my problem again. "You've got to accept that you've got a therapeutic personality," he said. "Some people are like that, and a man in trouble can spot you in a second. It's good to have that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attribute when you're trying to get information from someone for a story. I used to have the same problem."

"How did you get over it?" I asked.

"Sometimes, I simply didn't answer. I tried not to show sympathy," he said. "Now, when a deep personal problem comes up, I change the subject. I try to look fierce, uninterested, which is hard for me to do. You can spend your days listening to people who want advice. I'd rather read newspapers."

We then touched our customary bases: Ross, gossip, egregious newspaper reporting, the war, and a diatribe of his about a parsimonious or dead publisher. In a casual tone, he said, "I'm going out west for the rest of summer and then I plan to spend some of the fall in Chicago dicing the Colonel and his city for this magazine. But I've told Leo Hofeller that I would still like you to work for me, on a part-time basis, until I come back. I expect I'll come back."

That sounded ominous to me and I said so. "Well, you hit a nerve in what you told me yesterday," he said. "You wouldn't call me a bundle of joy, either. I'm going to try to freelance a bit and see what happens."

"You aren't going to leave *The New Yorker*?" I said.

He looked shocked. "I hadn't thought of it like that," he said. "I'll probably be back. Maybe it's a separation rather than a divorce. Ross said he'd keep my office for me."

"I hope so," I said.

"I'm going to Reno," Mr. Liebling said, "to get a two-for-one, a divorce and a remarriage."

"I'm sorry," I said. What else could I say?

"I am," he said, "and I'm not."

When we got back to the office, he gave me enough tasks to tide me over until the winter. Chiefly, he wanted me to research the career of General Omar Nelson Bradley, who was then Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon, and to provide a good synthesis of his combat career in the Second World War, based on the facts, and also an accounting of his career as a cadet at West Point. This would entail, he said, some work in the archives at West Point. "You can hold this information until I return or until I ask for it. I think your idea of doing a profile of Bradley is a good one, so I'll put your work in the bank when and if I come back and Ross approves it. For now, it's on hold and you're helping me while the fates decide. I suspect I'll come back. But I need to get away."

During his absence, I regained my proficiency at sharpening Mr. Ross's pencils, and I was given the task of straightening the files of old issues of the magazine that were stored in a long closet. I spent as much time as I could in the closet, reading old issues. And I also worked in the art department, rejecting unsolicited cartoons and in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

displaying artwork at the weekly meetings attended by Ross. At an art meeting, Mr. Ross said, "All writers are crazy. That's why they're writers." I made a note of this morsel to save for Mr. Liebling.

In the winter, Mr. Liebling returned and I went back to work for him full-time. I'd managed to accumulate a lot of information, a book of facts, including reproductions of records and excerpts from records. I could advise Mr. Liebling how good a football player Bradley had been at West Point as well as incidental information on how good a football player Eisenhower had been and how his football career had ended with an injury.

Mr. Liebling, with Ross's approval, began writing his profile of Bradley in earnest. We often had lunch together, either at a neighborhood greasy spoon or a decent place. During these lunches he poked my brains about the information I was gathering for him on Bradley. With me, Mr. Liebling always ate moderately and he never displayed the gluttony that he claimed in his articles on food and that others who ate with him said he displayed.

His manuscript grew to book size. He spent more time reading what he'd written than working on new material, or so it seemed to me. One late afternoon, he said he needed some information to complete the profile and that he needed it as fast as possible. What he wanted were some clippings from the *Washington Post.* I said I'd get them for him. I went to the New York Public Library to find them. The Library didn't have them. What to do? I decided to fly to Washington and get the clippings at the newspaper. I went to La Guardia and flew to Washington. It was about eight o'clock when I got to the newspaper. I went upstairs and told a reporter that I was doing some research for A. J. Liebling. The reporter took me to the library and found the newspapers I was looking for; then he copied the clippings for me and put them in an envelope. I thanked him and went back to the airport and caught a plane back to New York.

When Mr. Liebling came in before lunch, I gave him the clippings. "Well, I'll be damned," he said. "This is fast." I told him I'd flown to Washington to get them. He smiled and said, "I'll be damned. Give me your expenses, Dan. This is great work." I thanked him. In the afternoon, I gave him my expenses, with receipts; I'd spent twenty-eight dollars and twenty-two cents, including my round-trip airfare.

A few weeks later, he said, "I've finished the profile. This calls for dinner. Let me take you to Bleeck's." On the way over to the restaurant, which was close to the offices of the *Herald Tribune,* I felt as though I had really made it. This was the hangout of New York's more prominent journalists. To appear there with A. J. Liebling was like being introduced to the best society. I told him so. "Not so," he said. "You ought to call me Joe." I really had it made.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At dinner—again, he ate a modest meal—he talked about Bradley and other generals he had known and he pointed out some of the military disfunctions in Korea. "By the way," he said, "I'm having a hard time getting the business office to pay you for your trip to Washington." "Why is that?" I asked. "Because they're so cheap. They said I should have ordered the articles by mail. I told them I needed them at once. I'll get your money, even if I have to pay you myself."

My unhappiness at that was mitigated by his suggesting that I call him Joe. "I've written a small piece that's progressing with favorable comments up the line," I said. "Maybe I'll get paid a decent amount for that, if they decide to publish it." "Don't count on it," he said. "But I'm sure they'll pay you something."

My article was published, and William Shawn told me that several staff writers (including Peter De Vries) and the editor of the fact department thought it was very good. I felt that I was now a writer. But when Harold Ross met me in the hall several days after its publication and said, "You're the best pencil sharpener I've ever had. And now you're a goddam writer. Goddam," I had an immediate reaction that something wasn't right.

I discussed my situation with Mr. Liebling. He said the signs of my future on the magazine didn't look all that good. Not long after, I decided to leave New York. On the day before my departure, Mr. Liebling invited me to lunch. I told him how much I enjoyed working for him and he lobbed the encomium back. "Keep in touch," he said. "I wish I'd known you better. I think of you as a friend. You put in more hard work than I had a right to expect, and you're a most persistent, resourceful, and hardworking digger after information." And then he reached in his coat pocket and gave me a letter, which said just that, with an added fillip: "I like him fine." He addressed the letter "To Anybody." Soon after, I left *The New Yorker.*

Over the years, I've become an intimate reader of Liebling and I've made a betting line on which topic of his will have lasting interest. His press criticism is fun to read; but no more than that. Journalism is a fat target, and he stuck it with perception and even grace. My feeling is that his press articles will not have an enduring shelf life. Ten-to-one says his books on the press will be out of print in a decade. His thrust on the slope of food is elegant reading, and his knowledge and his descriptions of great French food make anyone want to spend some time in France. (I wouldn't recommend trying to retrace his culinary adventures there, though. Armed with his book *Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris* and a sensible, limited budget, my wife and I went to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paris to seek out some of his haunts and some new ones. We were dismayed to discover the extraordinarily poor quality of our meals. Between meals, we had *croque messieurs* or grilled ham and cheese sandwiches at bistros. We complained to a friend in the French government. "*Alors!*" he said. "No wonder. Almost all of our chefs now are Turks. We seldom go out for dinner.") Anyhow, on the line of food, I place the future of Liebling at six to one. He's as pleasant to read as Joseph Wechsberg and Ludwig Bemelmans, both of whom wrote for *The New Yorker.* Neither writer makes you feel blowsy and stuffed just reading about meals, as Liebling does.

Still, if you wish to learn about food while simultaneously avoiding the inclination to eat a large dinner, he deserves scrutiny. Liebling was a great "feeder," as he called his affliction for food. Of course, people ate more heavily in Liebling's day than they do now; still, you wouldn't want to emulate him. Food, I guess, was seldom out of his mind after his one-year stay in France, in 1926. His generous father paid for a year's study at the Sorbonne. But Liebling matriculated in exploring "the taste of food prepared in ways new to me." And in writing the great American novel, which he never finished.

Food is served in many unexpected places in his articles and books. The digression into food is like cleansing your palate between courses with sorbet. In his book *Normandy Revisited,* written in 1954, he recalls—while he's on an LCIL (Landing Craft, Infantry, Large) approaching Omaha Beach on D-Day Plus Three—a Normandy village near the Beach where, in 1926, he "had once eaten a magnificent *sole normande,* bedewed with shelled mussels, on the terrace of a restaurant looking out on a summer sea." And that led to a further reminiscence:

> The sojourn had a no less pronounced effect upon my tastes in food. I am still of the opinion that Lower Normandy has the best sea food, the best mutton (from the salt meadows of the Avranches region), the best beef, the best butter, the best cream, and the best cheese in Europe, and that the ideal light lunch is a dozen *huitres de Courseulles,* an *araignée de mere* (spider crab) with a half pint of mayonnaise on the side, a dish of *tripes à la mode de Caen,* a partridge Olivier Basselin, poached in cream and cider and singed in old Calvados, a *gigot de pré-salé,* a couple of *biftecks,* and a good Pont l'Eveque. I can no longer stand up to it in one sitting, as the Irishmen say in the storybooks, but that is not the fault of the menu. It is my metabolism that has collapsed.

Liebling had a good war. The variety of his wartime experiences exceeds that of anyone else I know. On land, sea, and air, including voyages on submarines, B-24 bombers, and in the front lines with the infantry in North Africa and Europe, his experiences often allowed him to become a participant as well as a spectator. If war correspondents were awarded military medals, he would have received a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chestful of them. Liebling was in the middle of a lot of fighting and witnessed the death in combat of many men. He was in the right place at the right time to develop a precise and personal history of the course of the war. Although not many war correspondents stayed at Claridge's, in London, he observed London afire; and few American war correspondents were in Paris, at a fancy hotel, the night German bombs first fell on the city in 1940.

Liebling's writing about the war is so keen because he almost casually places events in the context of what else was happening and how he and others spent their days and nights. When the first bombs fell on Paris, on May 10, 1940, early in the morning, he wrote that in the afternoon he went to Anteuil to see the horses run. And, he notes, on the same day, the Germans were taking Arnhem, Maastricht, and attacking Rotterdam. He advises us that Holland had fifty bombers and Germany five thousand. And, inevitably, he digresses into what he ate. But, no matter how far away from combat and strategy he wanders, the main picture is men in combat and the peculiarities of military leaders. His many pieces on war have been reformulated into several books. I suggest that some day an editor will recognize that his pieces and books will warrant placing them in a kind of all-embracing sequence, in which one can gain a finer understanding of the war in Europe and North Africa than in many books by other writers. Liebling, in almost all of his writing, was actually composing his autobiography. And war was a significant aspect of his life. Even money says this body of his work will command continuing interest for many, many years.

There are a number of idiosyncracies in Liebling's wartime writing that only a pedant or curiosity seeker will notice. He had an affinity for nouns and proper names that ended with "ist"—a person who throws tomatoes is a *tomatist. Parachutists, defeatists* and *artillerists* are bounded by *putschists, Petainists, Pattonists, Eisenhowerists, Montgomeryists,* and *Girandists.*

Liebling was a boxer until he reached the age of forty-two, and he knew a lot about the intricacies of boxing. *The Sweet Science,* published in 1956 and composed of eighteen boxing pieces that he'd written for *The New Yorker* over the years, offers a ringside view of many of the leading prizefighters of the time, including Rocky Marciano, Jersey Joe Walcott, Archie Moore, Sandy Saddler, Willy Pep, Floyd Patterson, Joe Louis, Ezzard Charles, and assorted trainers, handlers, and managers, including Whitey Bimstein, Freddie Brown, Ruby Goldstein, Cheerful Norman, Al Weill, Mush Salow, and Sammy Richman. They're history, of course, You wouldn't read this book unless you had an overriding interest in their careers or in the history of boxing itself. You'd read it to gain Liebling's stylish, idiosyncratic jabs at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

practitioners of the sweet science; that alone is worth the price of admission. But be forewarned: you'd best approach this book as a table d'hôte of Saturday afternoon club fights, to be savored at intervals.

The title, *The Sweet Science*, comes from Pierce Egan, who Liebling describes in the introduction as "the great historian of Boxiana" and "the greatest writer about the ring who ever lived." Egan lived from 1772 to 1849; he covered boxing in England. He is one of Liebling's heroes. You might call the introduction Liebling's own round one. In it, he feints and jabs with his customary literary similes and metaphors and allows you to predict the outcome: Liebling, with the aid of *his* trainer, Egan, will win. An intimation of Liebling's style in the ring: "Archie Moore, a late-maturing artist, like Laurence Sterne and Stendahl. . . ." The introduction previews the eighteen fights in the book.

Pierce Egan is in Liebling's corner throughout the book. In one of the first matches, Egan is referred to as "the immortal historian of the British ring." In a later match, Egan is "the Herodotus of the London prize ring." In the next match: "Pierce Egan, the Froissart of the London prize ring." Liebling, in the next fight, between Ezzard Charles and Rocky Marciano, comes out at the bell with "Pierce Egan, the Sire de Joinville of the London prize ring." Liebling leads, in the next fight, with his customary rabbit punch: " . . . Pierce Egan, the Philippe de Commines of the London prize ring." (Have you heard of Philippe de Commines? I haven't.) And a sweeping combination in the last fight: " . . . Pierce Egan, the Edward Gibbon and Sir Thomas Malory of the Old London prize ring."

Liebling learned New York in much the same way that Lewis Mumford did; both were autodidactic students of the city, Liebling concentrating on people and Mumford mainly on scale and form. New York became a continuing post-doctoral gallimaufry in the study of characters for Liebling. During his twenty-eight years on *The New Yorker*, Liebling wrote hundreds of articles, the majority of them, I believe, about characters he knew. Harold Ross referred to them, so he told Liebling, as "low-lifes," persons of no importance. Ross didn't care for this; but he never forbade Liebling to pursue the low-lifes. The low-life articles would fill many books, and many of them did. Ferene Holuban, the Man without a Neck; Sergei Kalmikoff, the Crashing Cossack; Fritz Kley, the German Corkscrew; Joe Rogers, aka Dr. Itch; Nathan R. Eagle; Morty Goldberg; Dr. Titus T. Heatherington; Jack McGuire; Mr. Hy Sky; Morty Ormont; Jerry Rex; Acid Test Ike; Marty the Clutch; Judge Horumph; Count de Pennies; Maxwell C. Bimberg; Boatrace Harry; Mrs. Rosa Braune; Colonel John R. Stingo, the nom de plume of James A. Macdonald, the racetrack writer; Thomas W. O'Brien; Hymie Katz; J. Bates Keating; Izzy Yereshevsky of the I. & Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cigar store. Mix them together and you make several books about oddball, New York characters. Stir them again and you place some of them in several reconstituted books. Colonel John R. Stingo has a book of his own, *The Honest Rainmaker: The Life and Times of Colonel John R. Stingo.* Like Preston Sturgis's wonderful cast of stock characters, Liebling's characters appear again in this book. In fact, they appear in many books, including *The Earl of Louisiana.* When Liebling bogged down in the heat of Baton Rouge researching a profile of Earl Long, he revived his spirits by inserting a few *pensées* of Whitey Bimstein.

I haven't the foggiest what the line is on the future of these books. I know that they are best taken in small sips, as though you're balancing your thirst while you try not to distend a multi-layered *pousse-café.* No matter. Like truffles in a paté, pasta, or another dish, one percent of Liebling elevates the taste to a level of great satisfaction.

Liebling and I kept up a desultory correspondence. I moved to Boston. In the late fifties, he was invited to spend a week as a resident of Harvard's undergraduate Kirkland House. Charles Taylor, a medieval historian and an acquaintance of mine, was then the Master of Kirkland House. Liebling had written me that he was coming to Cambridge, and a few days after he arrived, he called me and I invited him to dinner. We ate hamburgers at Elsie's and we talked about *The New Yorker* and the changes that had occurred since Ross's death; and he talked about his first few days at Kirkland House. "What's with Taylor?" he asked. I don't get him." I believe that I said that Charles Taylor was a good historian, and let it go at that. I wasn't much of a conversationalist. After our meal, Liebling invited me to join him and Taylor for drinks in the visitor's suite at Kirkland House. I accepted and showed up the next day in the late afternoon. The three of us tried to talk to one another; but the conversation was sent askew by frequent interruptions and mumblings. When Taylor was alone with me for a few minutes, he asked, "What's with Liebling? I don't get him." I answered that he was a good guy.

On December 29, 1963, the *New York Times* ran an obituary of A. J. Liebling, who had died of bronchial pneumonia the previous day. He was sixty. In the death notices, his name appeared between Kramer, Hyman and Levey, Delphine. The bare bones of history in his obituary would scarcely fit more than a third of one of his own opening paragraphs. I had lost a man whom I greatly admired, and I realized that during the eleven years I had known him, I had failed to become a close friend of his. Sadly, the fault was mine. Since then, I have closed the gap, and through my dipping into his books, I have continued our friendship, and he remains one of my teachers. He was a sweet man.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Naturalist

(for William Bartram)

EUGENE SCHLANGER

To what end our passions might have hurried
Had it not been for some envious matrons
Who encircled the Cherokee virgins
Harvesting wild strawberries, bathing
Their limbs in the cold fleeting streams, staining
The waters with their rich fruit and laughter.
Thus spake William Bartram of Pennsylvania
Who crossed the Carolinas, Georgia and
Florida, hunting flowers and flora
On commission for Dr. John Fothergill
Who maintained one of the finest gardens
In England—and Europe—and sought finer
Specimens. Bartram's adventure lapped
The Revolutionary War but not all
Men wage war simultaneously.
After farming and commerce Bartram took
To horse, mostly alone, following
Indian tracks and meeting the first men
And women of this civilization.
Why do men take to the woods, follow
Paths through wilderness, maintain order
In their deportment, as if habit or
Custom will preserve their character when
Society and its mores are long past?
Unlike the vicious, rabid creatures,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Who retreat to die, attempting the salve
Of solitude to cool feverish viral
Demands, some Eighteenth Century men
Sought flowers and the newest signs of life
On an Earth unfolding its order.
Commerce continued its diligent course;
Hamilton wrestled with Jefferson;
Wordsworth and Coleridge devoured Bartram's book
As France devoured itself. Bartram settled
Outside Philadelphia, thirty-eight;
There remained. Do we judge the man or flower?

✪ EUGENE SCHLANGER's poems are forthcoming in the *Sewanee Review* and the *Western Humanities Review*. He has just completed a novel.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of Paradoxes and Tautologies

BERT O. STATES

In Plato's dialogue Parmenides maintains that "Everything is relative to every other thing in the following way: either it is the same, or different, or, if it is neither the same nor different, it is part relative to whole or whole relative to part." This is what in logic is called a lemma, or a theorem proved in the course of, and for the sake of, the proof of still another theorem. In this particular case, the theorem serves as a step in the evolution of Parmenides' examination of the problem of the unity of forms.

My interests are much more modest; they have to do not so much with unity as with diversity, or with our perception of variation and multiplicity in the order of things—in short, with the sense in which we must constantly use Parmenides' principles, if we may call them such, in order to make sense of the world. If Parmenides is right, these two relational pairs (same/different; part/whole) should sufficiently exhaust all the possibilities in our perception and interpretation of reality. Without them you couldn't know anything in a systematic or even a casual way. You couldn't say, "My, how Sarah has changed," or "Thank God it's cooler today," or "I'll have three of the small ones and one of the large." You couldn't differentiate anything from anything else or tell when something began or ended, you couldn't make distinctions among aspects of single entities, you couldn't recognize your spouse (not to mention yourself), and for all practical purposes you would be brain-dead.

When I first encountered Parmenides' theorem I felt that rare intellectual thrill one has when the world suddenly comes into a new clarity. What a comfort to know that we deal with all the complexities

✪ BERT O. STATES, Professor of Dramatic Art at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is the author of *Hamlet and the Concept of Character, The Rhetoric of Dreams, Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater, Dreaming and Storytelling,* and, most recently, *Seeing in the Dark: Reflections on Dreams and Dreaming.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of experience through such simple forms of mental acuity and that they can be pinned down so neatly! Like the character in Molière, I suddenly felt I had a name for everything I'd been doing all my life without thinking about it. Why, I even used Parmenides' principles in order to discover the fundamental value of the principles themselves.

But the more I pondered the matter, the more the two principles—same-otherness and part-wholeness—came to have an odd symbiotic relationship to each other that raised my suspicions (unfounded, it turns out) that they may be twice as much as we need in order to face all these problems. That is, you couldn't have one set in mind without having at least the ghost of the other, just as you couldn't have "sameness" or "partness" in mind unless you were also aware of the otherness and wholeness that lie behind them, as figure does to ground (and try to imagine a figure *without* a ground!). For example, you can't distinguish parts from wholes without thinking in terms of sameness and difference (parts are *different* from wholes and wholes are not the *same* as parts); moreover, any whole might, in turn, be a part of a larger whole, and so forth. You might be able to detect sameness and difference without reference to part-wholeness—at least *part* of the time—but part-wholeness hovers invisibly in the background, if only in the awareness that there are different wholes (or categories) and the parts of any single whole are different from the parts of any other whole, even as they also differ from each other.

Finally, there is a tacit understanding that looking at *anything* is not the same thing as looking at *everything*, at Being in all its multitudinous splendor. For example, the Science page of my newspaper this morning reports that a London neuropsychiatrist has found that people can look either at the whole of a scene or picture or at a part of it but not both at once, and this fact, he claims, might explain why people have *different* visual capabilities. At any rate, if you are standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon looking down, you soon find your eye focusing on the more "interesting" parts, rather than on the whole hole. And the "parts" that are most interesting will in all likelihood be those that offer to the eye either a strong contrast to the surrounding parts (a pinnacle of free-standing rock), a stark uniformity (a sheer cliff wall), or an unusual symmetry or asymmetry. In other words, your eye would be drawn to masses of sameness or to outcroppings of difference, or combinations of both—all this against the backdrop of the huge gaping (w)hole, of which you are seeing only a very small part. And you wouldn't even think twice about this; you'd simply point and say, "Wow, look at *that*!" as if perceptual choices hadn't even been made. Or, more modestly, when you say, "Susan and Celeste are two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

different people" (for whatever reason), you have in mind, at least as a groundwork, different parts of a single whole (humankind) against which you automatically comprehend what is meant by excluding other possible wholes. On the other hand, when you say "Susan is not a grasshopper" (for whatever reason), your meaning implies that two entirely different wholes—two different species—are involved in your comparison.

But notice how these principles bear on still other similar operations we call by different names. For instance, the statement "Susan and Celeste are two different people" is a metonymic construction (comparison within a single field—people—or a "whole" consisting of contiguous parts), whereas the second statement, "Susan is not a grasshopper," would be a metaphoric construction (comparison between two different fields: humans and insects), since you are probably implying (unless the statement is nonsense) that grasshoppers tell us something about Susan, even though Susan *isn't* a grasshopper, or isn't even *like* one. The construction remains metaphoric even so because Susan and grasshoppers are bound into a context of resemblance/non-resemblance (sameness/difference); and since there is no such thing as a negative image, the "not" would simply be an instruction on how to take the relation between Susan and grasshoppers. (Of course you'd have to know Susan personally to make any sense of this.) When Senator Lloyd Bentsen said that Dan Quayle wasn't "Jack Kennedy" he was pointing out, by "negative" (or ironical) metaphor, something Dan Quayle was by telling us something he wasn't. So "Susan isn't a grasshopper" might tell us a good deal more about Susan than that she doesn't have long back legs and antennae. Finally, on still other tropological ground, we must note that all of these invocations of likeness and difference involve us in the business of synecdoche (the master trope of part/wholeness) because we are dealing with specific entities, or representatives, of different wholes of meaning and implication, and these wholes and their different parts form a subliminally perceived, or understood, gridwork against which we assess all of reality.

The point in going into all this is that even our master tropes—the fundamental building blocks of much of our language and thought—are deeply based on the principles of same-otherness and part-wholeness: they are different ways of expressing the same point. As Kenneth Burke puts it in his classic essay on the tropes, "Give a man but one of them, tell him to exploit its possibilities, and if he is thorough in doing so, he will come upon the other three." And what he would be coming upon would be special applications of Parmenides' two "possibilities." Indeed, metaphor (and irony) are largely devices for "seeing some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing *in terms of* something else" (or same-otherness), whereas metonymy and synecdoche are "special applications" of the principle of part-wholeness. The former two (metaphor and irony) are what we might call the "traveling" tropes, meaning that they "jump" from one whole to another; the latter two, metonymy and synecdoche (often confused), are "stay-at-home" tropes, meaning that they work within single wholes. But as Albert Henry has said, there is always something metonymic about metaphor and something metaphoric about metonymy, and you can even end up with such hybrid creatures as metonymic metaphors, synecdochic ironies, and even synecdochic-metaphoric metonymies with an ironic twist. For example, when Claudius speaks of "bear[ing] our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom . . . contracted in one brow of woe" he is using at least two metonymies and/or synecdoches to make a metaphor. You might say that a poor metaphor is one that either has no recognizable metonymic integrity ("My love is a rectangle.") or too much metonymic integrity ("My home, my place of residence!").

In fact, if you deconstruct any metaphor, you find that it is held together by a combination of metonymic and ironic energy. That is, there is always something surreptitious or cryptic about the way a metaphor tells you that something is like something else without telling you what the likeness is. This is the basic stance of irony: the unmistakable implication that the real text is a subtext 180 degrees away that you have to get for yourself. But there is also something appropriate about the metaphor—a good one anyway—that forces you to see a truth behind the ironic turn. So the metaphor is ironic in means but metonymic in its end of wanting to bring two strangers together. The best examples, obviously, can be found in the practice of punning (for instance, Hamlet's "Nay, mother, I am too much in the sun" or Mercutio's "Look for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man"); but the principle holds for the most innocent of metaphors as well, all of which assume that you are "in on" a word game and can make the necessary move from the explicit to the implicit. Hamlet has a good deal of fun, at Polonius's expense, by refusing to play this game and taking words straight:

> *Pol.* What do you read, my lord?
> *Ham.* Words, words, words.
> *Pol.* What is the matter, my lord?
> *Ham.* Between whom?

To look at the matter a slightly different way: irony's tendency is to cast something out of itself to its antonym or contrast in the realm of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

things, to go "all the way" from A to non-A, as Burke would say; metonymy restrains this movement, keeping it on the same generic premises, like a parent saying to a child, "Okay, you can go out and play, but you must stay in *our* yard." In other words, "Don't go metaphoring in other metonymic fields." There seems to be an unwritten principle that metaphors behave metonymically. Like human beings, metaphors tend to produce offspring genetically like themselves. If a poet starts out by making a metaphor about blood, or flowers or containers, he or she will probably remain with that category, or at least nearby, throughout the poem, because if there is a virtue in novelty (difference) there is even more virtue in unified or harmonious novelty (sameness). What I'm suggesting is that Parmenides' two principles are themselves only two parts of a single unified whole for which I am unable to find a name unless it would be something like *relativity.* But that isn't much help because it just puts an over-confident abstraction in place of a troubling specific. Or, to put the same idea a different way, it identifies a whole without coming to terms with its parts.

Or might consciousness be the best word for it, whatever *it* is? Could it be that we are really expressing what consciousness *does* in order to deserve the name of consciousness? Could something possess consciousness that couldn't make such distinctions among the things of reality? Philosophers tell us that to be conscious is to be conscious *of* something. That is, consciousness can't occur in a thing-less vacuum but can only be known in relation to something it is contemplating or is aware of. Try to be conscious of nothing and you'll soon find things buzzing into your thingless space of pure contemplation, like a mosquito when you're trying to nap. And as they do you'll probably begin naming them—that is, recognizing what they are in relation to other possible things ("There's that damned mosquito again!"). To be conscious of nothing is to be unconscious. Consciousness, at a minimum, is being aware that there is something there that isn't the same as what surrounds it. Otherwise, consciousness would be an unvariegated blur—if that. This isn't an attempt to define consciousness (which is an impossible problem), only to say that it is the source of our ability to perceive distinctions.

This isn't saying much, I admit, because it's also the source of everything else we do or are, but it's a necessary fundamental to bear in mind. In his book *The Conscious Mind* (1996) David Chalmers tells us that "the structure of consciousness is mirrored in the structure of awareness" and prominent among structures of awareness is what he calls a "*difference* structure" that allows us to see relations of similarity and difference among things. Another is the *intensity* structure that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

allows us to distinguish, say, an intense pain from a faint pain; another is the *resolution* structure, which helps us to form high resolution at the center of a visual field and low resolution at the fringe"—in other words, how to look at parts without getting confused by the whole. (Imagine a world in which you saw everything all at once with equal intensity, like Borges's character Funes!) But as far as I can see, all such structures involve degrees of similarity and difference, the beginning point of all processing of perceptual information.

If consciousness is always an awareness of something other than itself, it seems inescapable that Parmenides' theorem is a way of describing what consciousness is obliged to do, so to speak, for a living. Consciousness is the power of perceiving same-otherness and part-wholeness in the open (or mental) world. So we seem to have got perception down to a simple binary system with the same infinite power of expansion and contraction that is possible with the zeroes and ones that make a digital computer work. You can look at wholes or parts of all sizes and you can tell them apart or put them together on various levels of sameness and otherness. Still, it seems wise to keep same-otherness and part-wholeness apart, for much the same reason that a compass needs a north-south polarity *and* an east-west polarity. The human mind seems much more comfortable when it can think in terms of dialectical pairs, and two pairs are better than one, not only in poker but in perception. (As one of my students puts it, two Parmenides beats one of a kind.) If we maintain two pairs (same-otherness and part-wholeness) we have a sharper tool for assessing the diversity of the world; two pairs allow us to see the world with a kind of binocular vision. In fact, binocular vision is nothing more than a peculiar application of same/otherness in which two views of the same thing are *slightly* different and as a result allow us to see slightly more of the *whole* that disappears around the back of the *part* we're looking at.

With two pairs, all of the subtleties of perception are released. For instance, the relation, say, of sameness to otherness can be broken down still further. As with our gregarious master tropes, one can see the sameness in two things ("alike as two peas in a pod"); one can see the difference in two "same" things (pea A, though virtually identical to pea B, is not pea B); one can see sameness-within-difference (the sphere-ness in apples and baseballs); and one can see difference-within-sameness (Susan and Celeste). These modes of perception are not categorically different from one another; they are simply different "adjectival" calibrations within the field of perception. One might say that they are four different parts of the same whole—which is only half of the *whole* whole of consciousness—each revealing a different nu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ance of thing-ness in relation to otherness. Nor can we claim that seeing a thing in one of these modes cancels out all trace of other ways it can simultaneously be seen: it is simply a matter of what is brought forth by one's "motive" in seeing. For example, the "perceptual" act of hearing music—say, a Bach fugue—is an intricate sequence of same/other—part/whole interchanges, or what Susanne Langer calls a fusion of sameness and novelty. The musical equivalent of the pun is probably musical counterpoint in which a harmonic relationship is established between two "statements" that allows each one to retain its individual sameness—as long as it doesn't wander off on a different key.

So, too, the part-whole relation can be broken down into subperspectives or parts: you can see something as a part (tree < forest) of a whole; you can see something as a complete whole in itself even though it is obviously only a part of something larger; finally, you can see partness-against-wholeness. All of these ways of seeing come into play when you think you are primarily seeing in one of the ways (looking at the part alone); and all this at the same time that you're also seeing things along the spectrum of sameness and otherness. What is frustrating about all this is that putting the point like this makes the whole process seem like a lot of things are going on in the act of seeing. I suppose in one sense there are, but stretching out what's happening in this serial word construction I'm obliged to use erases the entire sense of instantaneous cohesion, of everything happening at once, and above all, it substitutes the conceptual quality of the words for the experience itself.

All told, what I'm offering here is an (probably) annoying verbal breakdown of what the philosopher Eugene Gendlin calls "cross-understanding" and/or "experiential intricacy": that is, the sense in which understanding does not consist in recognizing a certain distinction in something, in one expressible and portable concept or perception, *and looking at that alone*, but of that "distinction" being set into place in cooperation with the whole contextual *excess* surrounding it. Figure/ground again. This is what seems to me deficient about deconstruction as a way of seeing. In its zeal to prove that all "things" contain an infinity of *elsewheres* and *others*, arriving at a skepticism toward all meaning, it ignores the sense in which meaning is invariably possible only as an approximation of variable endurance that is derived from *relationships*, as Parmenides says, among things that may either be regarded as parts or as wholes depending on how (and when) you look at them. Any part is also a whole-unto-itself. Part-wholeness is invariably a matter of emphasis, or of locating entities that may be treated as either wholes or parts for purposes of under-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

standing something for a more or less specific purpose. In short, seeing something, or seeing one way, is always a matter of also seeing everything that it isn't and doing so *at the same time.*

To put all this into language, of course, is a falsification of the experience itself because experience is not broken down into parts and it is also not a great big whole but a cooperation of everything that is there, *in it,* and probably a good deal that is outside of it as well. As Gendlin says in *Thinking Beyond Patterns,* "Each word says the whole string [of words preceding it], and it says the .... [the "slot," or the still-to-be-said of implication]. Each has its own way of saying more of that slot."

The same thing occurs when we move away from things proper to the attributes that things possess, such as one-many, small-large, near-far, light-heavy, up-down, rest-motion, friendly-hostile, inferior-superior, and so on, until the cows come home. Is perception always confined to the same/different or part/whole relationships? Are there other, more fundamental ways of perceiving? Let's look at a few examples. If you see one billiard ball as being nearer to the eye than another, aren't you really involved in a different perceptual process? Not really, because you can account for the phenomenon by invoking Parmenides' same/different relation. What you actually see is a *difference in size* (in two otherwise identical objects), which past experience leads you to interpret as a function of distance, and not of the actual size of the object. Or, when you see one billiard ball in motion, passing another one at rest, doesn't the same operation ensue with respect to a difference in *state*? Even if there is only one ball on the table and it is in motion, don't you perceive the motion with respect to the table—that is, a certain part-whole relation between ball and table in which the ball and the table are perceived as being parts of a single whole (the game of billiards) in *different states*? So, too, with up-downness, small-largeness, in-outness, here-thereness, now-thenness, and so on. In order to make any distinction, there have to be things to distinguish, and when there are things to distinguish, we are back with Parmenides.

Perhaps the best way to see just how impeccable Parmenides' principles are is to see how they apply to more general situations. As it happens, the Parmenides lemma is related to another of the most memorable moments in my reading. I refer to Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation* (1964), which sets forth the astonishing idea (largely forgotten or ignored these days) that all creative thought—humor, scientific discovery, and art in all its forms—can be seen as a consequence of a process of bisociation, or the discovery of hidden similarities in two seemingly unrelated chains of thought. Succinctly put:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When two hidden matrices of perception or reason interact with each other the result . . . is either a *collision* ending in laughter, or their *fusion* in a new intellectual synthesis, or their *confrontation* in an aesthetic experience. . . . The same pair of matrices can produce comic, tragic, or intellectually challenging effects.

Or, to put the idea in Parmenidean terms, to produce a bisociation put two different parts of two different wholes on a collision course, and depending on your state of mind or purpose in doing so and the nature of your choices, the collision will result in one of three things—a paradox, a synthesis, or an aesthetic experience. Thus, as Koestler puts it elsewhere, "Comic discovery is paradox stated—scientific discovery is paradox resolved." As it happens, this sentence is itself a linguistic example of the very principle it enunciates. You want to say, "Nicely put." But "Nicely put" is really a matter of getting a point that has been *put* in a parallel structure (sameness) and getting a point is always—invariably—arriving at a place where (at least) two heretofore unconnected chains of thought come together and make a kind of sense—or splendid nonsense, in the case of a joke. "Getting the point," in other words, means "I get the connection between two hitherto unconnected things, events, sets, statements, etc." In fact, there is something joke-like about all discovery; the "Aha!" or "Eureka!" of scientific discovery and the "Ha ha!" of laughter are different parts of the same cathectic whole. When a scientist discovers a new connection, or when a poet finally finds the "right word" to fill an empty "slot," or even when you discover that the car keys were safely stored in your purse after all, there is always at least a faint inclination to laugh.

Since my reading of Koestler I have been unable to find a single example of humor (jokes, cartoons, etc.) that doesn't involve a bisociation of some sort at some level of connection. It has occurred to me that the reason for my failure may be that I am always, so to speak, wearing bifocals that allow me to see only bisociations; but try as I have to get out of the mode, I am unable to move beyond Koestler's explanation. For example, in a recent cartoon I see a single frame of Dan Piraro's "Bizarro" series that features a TV anchorwoman announcing the following news item: "Dozens of rush-hour motorists were treated for shock today when a truck carrying 400 cases of ketchup collided with a shipment of mannequins, spilling the contents of both onto the expressway."

This isn't one of the world's great jokes, perhaps, but it is a perfect illustration of Koestler's principle, because all jokes are (figuratively speaking) collisions between two least likely vehicles, which are then (at the point of collision) seen to be "meant for each other," much as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Oedipus and Laius, his natural father, were the two least/most likely people in the world to bump into each other at the crossroads: at once a paradox (of one sort) "stated" and a paradox (of another sort) "resolved." In short, they are examples of coincidence, a word that uniquely accounts for the double perspective involved in any bisociation: that is, a coincidence is, on one hand, "The state or fact of occupying the same relative position or area in space," and, on the other, it is also "A sequence of events that although accidental seems to have been planned or arranged."

But let us look more closely at this sameness/difference pair in this light. On the extremities—the starting points of any dialectic—*difference* takes the form of paradox or contradiction and *sameness* takes the form of self-repetition or tautology. Bisociation would be a mixture of sameness and difference because it leads eventually to a suddenly revealed similarity, or common denominator, in two different chains of thought or action. So bisociation is a closure of one of the two means, or principles, by which we tell one thing from another and you could probably make a case for a similar closure with the part/whole dyad, as when Copernicus discovered that the earth was a part of a different whole than anyone ever imagined, or when anyone who is "thinking small" discovers that the stakes are much larger than he or she imagined (as when you "can't see the forest for the trees," or the whole because you're detained in the part). In fact, our ketchup-mannikin joke is an excellent example of how a brand new whole can be formed out of two things that heretofore had nothing in common with each other. Not to get carried away on the point, but the joke achieves the same end, by the same means, as Thomas Hardy's reconstruction of the Titanic disaster out of a ship and a distant iceberg:

> Alien they seemed to be:
> No mortal eye could see
> The intimate welding of their later history,
>
> Or sign that they were bent
> By paths coincident
> On being anon twin halves of one august event.

Bisociation, then, may be seen as a fundamental strategy for dealing with the various consequences of our living in a mutable world consisting of systems nested within systems that resemble one another at certain levels of organization and structure. We arrange and make bisociations of all kinds because bisociations are the most thorough way of encompassing the diversity among the things that make up reality. Consider how unfunny the "Bizarro" joke would be if the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ketchup truck collided with a refrigerator truck. It might still pass as a joke because, on another level, ketchup and refrigerators go together like ham and eggs. But it wouldn't be as funny, or *pointed,* because the point to *get* isn't as sharp, if only because you can put almost anything in a refrigerator. It would be a little like Oedipus encountering a distant cousin at the crossroads instead of his father. And I take it that at least part of the popularity of the Oedipus story is the perfection of "opposites" inhering in the paradoxical situation. If you take a long objective view of it, Oedipus offers one of the funniest situations in literature.

On the other hand, we also laugh at tautologies, especially when they are unintentional, and tautology is presumably the farthest point in discourse from a bisociation, as when something clashes with—itself! Here are two examples from the world of politics: first, Alf Landon's "Wherever I have gone in this country I have found Americans," and Calvin Coolidge's "The more people out of work, the higher the unemployment." So here, it would seem, is proof that Koestler had only a part of the whole answer to the question of why we laugh and what we are laughing at. But are these examples not funny precisely because they contain phantom bisociations? When you finish the first half of the tautology ("The more people out of work,") the last thing you're expecting is a repetition of the *same* thing in *different* language. You've been led to expect a *development* of sense, and suddenly sense is back where it began. So the bisociation rests not in the setting forth of two different chains of thought or action, as in the wreck of the ketchup and mannequin trucks, but in the surprise at having got nowhere when you thought you were clearly on the way to something new and *different.* This is probably why it is faintly funny to see a person walking on a treadmill: he's clearly going somewhere in a hurry, but he remains in the same place.

But there is also a breed one might call the intentional tautology. When Alf Landon says "Wherever I have gone in this country I have found Americans," he undoubtedly means that he has found wonderful hard-working people whom he hoped will vote Republican in the upcoming election. In short, on our sliding Parmenidean scale of sameness/difference, Americans, in this context, means "true" Americans, not non-Americans, or foreigners. (By way of contrast, even stretching the point, it is hard to find the same justification in Dan Quayle's remark as Vice President in 1988: "We're going to have the best-educated Americans in the world.") And when Coolidge speaks of unemployment going up as more and more people are out of work, he is really calling attention to an economic crisis in much the same way that he was making a similar point when he said, "The business of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

America is business." (Again, compare this to another self-consuming Quayleism: "It isn't pollution that's harming the environment. It's the impurities in our air and water that are doing it.") In fact, I wonder if there isn't something about politics that attracts the tautology. The point is often to *seem* to make a statement, if not simply to bring up the topic, without really taking a stand on it. The tautology, strategically, would be a way of saying something without actually saying *much*, running it, so to speak, up the flagpole to see if anyone will salute. It is a form of shadow-boxing in which one seems to be doing battle with an opponent but one is only proving one knows how to fight. Tautology is a safe strategy: it gets the issue out there but phrases the solution in such a way that no one will be offended. The hearer can draw his or her own conclusions; the speaker is against the abuse but doesn't risk alienating the audience by going beyond the abuse itself. After all, as Quayle said on still another occasion, "If we don't succeed, we run the risk of failure." There is also an element of tautology at still larger levels, as when one party promises to do away with something (the national debt) and simply puts something in its place that is essentially the same thing in different language. For example, the old joke about the difference between capitalism and communism: communism is the exploitation of man by man; capitalism is just the reverse.

Coolidge probably didn't know it, but he seems to have been an expert in a figure of speech called *antanaclasis*, which involves a repetition of sense in different words in order to make a point. As Yogi Berra would say, an antanaclasis, like a baseball game, ain't over till it's *over*. And there is always a faint sense about such usages that their pith and marrow lie in a bisociation, or a kind of double "laundering" of the same money, as when Jack Kennedy (who is *not* Dan Quayle) exhorted people to ask not what their country can do for them but what they can do for their country. The most succinct antanaclastic tautology in the English language is probably "And that's that." A whole category of jokes, or joke making, is based on the principle of hidden tautology. Examples would range from the stupid "Why did the chicken cross the road?" ("To get to the other side.") or "Why did they bury the Scotchman on the hill?" ("Because he was dead.") to "What has four wheels and flies?" ("A garbage truck."). Finally, there is the superb example—one of the world's great jokes—offered by Freud:

> Two Jews met in a railway carriage at a station in Galacia. "Where are you going?" asked one. "To Cracow," was the answer. "What a liar you are!" broke out the other. "If you say you're going to Cracow, you want me to believe you're going to Lemberg. But I know that in fact you're going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Freud says that such jokes should be called "skeptical jokes" because they attack the certainty of our knowledge through the techniques of absurdity and "representation by the opposite." This makes sense, but I don't think that's why they are funny. For example, if someone wanted to prove that idea to you, he or she might say, "If I tell you something—for instance, that I'm going to Cracow—you might take the statement as the truth or as a lie, depending on your own understanding of the situation. Therefore, language is always subject to self-contradiction: the same statement can mean two different things to two different people." That would make the same point, but it wouldn't get a laugh. No, the impulse to laughter comes with the paradoxical effect of the first Jew's throwing Cracow out as a lie on the grounds that it is *the truth.* The paradox is "resolved" not by an absurdity but by shifting the conversation to the hidden level of the first Jew's suspicion. It's very sophisticated humor, but it's the same basic operation that we have in the garbage truck joke that leads us to think of "flies" as a verb until the punch line turns the same word into a noun. It is the structural derailment that gets the laugh.

I am not suggesting that Freud is wrong (Freud covers this very point in his chapter on the structure of jokes) but that it isn't meaning that is funny but the arrangement of the ingredients from which meaning can be derived. Technically, these aren't tautologies because there is nothing redundant about them; rather, they flirt with the redundancy involved in tautology in order to create a gap, or (as Gendlin might say) a slot, into which meaning can rush, like air into a vacuum. Laughter is a kind of self-reward for suffering the perils of paradox and contradiction, and one of the reasons we will never run out of jokes is that bisociation, like laughter itself, is a reflex that never wears out.

Is this always or necessarily the case? Today we seem to live in an era of radical cynicism that wants to set itself apart from every earlier era: hence the construction "post-this," and "post-that" is really our way of saying good-bye to all *thats,* or things that have earned the contempt that comes with familiarity. Cynicism isn't really the word for it, because a lot of people are having a lot of fun writing about the "breakdown" of practically everything. It's a kind of across-the-board *Galgenhumor,* or universal irony, in Kierkegaard's sense of irony, "the enthusiasm for destruction." For instance, I read the following in a new volume of essays on the postmodern titled *Signs of Change:*

Postmodernism may be said to question the ontological status of laughter. What is there to laugh at? Is there anything to laugh at? Or can you laugh at anything? In one of the episodes in the British television series "Monty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Python's Flying Circus" a city gent is turned into a universal laughing stock—whatever he says or does, however trivial it may seem, immediately makes his surroundings "collapse" with mirth, and apparently for no reason whatsoever! There is no longer any obvious relationship between laughter and its object."

The Monty Python people may well be very postmodern in laughing at everything the city gent says or does (and therefore laughing at nothing, or at anything), but I can't see how the "ontological status of laughter"—that is, the "relationship between laughter and [the] object" that provokes laughter—is any different from what it has always been: the content of the object has simply changed. Anything that is laughable, in any society at any time, is dependent upon its status at that place and moment. The object of laughter is usually something in social life that has somehow lost its inconspicuousness.

Perhaps postmodernists laugh at different things, or perhaps our infinite absolute skepticism and the indeterminate status of "the sign" have become so accepted that everything is conspicuous and ripe for picking, and laughter itself has become a "symbolic . . . and theoretical" response to life (Jacques Derrida, we are told, has been called "the laughing rabbi"); but even if this is the case, I can't see how such laughter differs from, say, standard satire or caricature *in its structure.* The only difference seems to be that the object, having lost its place in a dependable scheme of things, or having repeated itself so often, has become self-satirizing and therefore needs no satirist to highlight its absurdity. Simply pointing at it is enough. Since everything is unreliable in the postmodern world, the object—any object looked at from the postmodern perspective—simply becomes a sign of all the things we used to laugh at in days when laughter was (but I doubt it) more selective.

The Monty Python joke itself is an excellent example of bisociation if only because indiscriminate self-repetition (Bergson's "mechanical encrusting itself on the living") is a standard mechanism of laughter—not simply because it is self-repeating (as Koestler points out in his critique of Bergson) but because it is participating in two phenomenal chains that have nothing to do with each other (as in the joke where bored prisoners in a cell are so tired of hearing the same jokes that they number them and call out the numbers instead of telling the jokes: in other words, taken separately, jokes and numbers have no more in common than ketchup and mannequins). It is a kind of bisociated tautology in that the same response (laughter) occurs regardless of what is said. This is the structure of a million shaggy dog jokes. The expression "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" is itself distantly funny because it poses an unresolved paradox based on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Parmenedian scheme of sameness and difference, which may, at least in the world of humor, be the same thing. This is the joke in Marc Antony's definition of the crocodile: "It is shap'd, sir, like itself; and it is as broad as it hath breadth. It is just so high as it is, and it moves with its own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it; and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates." "Of what colour is it?" Lepidus asks, undaunted. "Of its own colour too," Antony says. And if it had been relevant for Lepidus to ask why unemployment or pollution were so high in Egypt, we know what Antony would have told him.

So tautology, like everything else, is a function of context, and context, in the context of my argument, is really a penumbra of assumed implications shared, more or less, by a certain group of people at a certain time. Apart from its usual dictionary meanings, the essence of tautology lies in the factor of repetition. "Insofar as an entire structure [or whole] is infused by a single generating principle," Burke says in *Language as Symbolic Action*, "this principle will be tautologically or repetitively implicit in all the parts." Or, in Parmenidean terms, there is always a sameness about the different parts of any given whole, because the reason for calling it a whole in the first place is that it possesses, within its limits, an overall integrity of substance and function. Depending on where you choose to stand on the scales of sameness and difference and partness and wholeness, you could as well argue that there is no such thing as tautology or that the world itself is a tautology, as in Burke's "Dialectician's Hymn," which begins "Hail to Thee, Logos," and ends with "Thy name a Great Synecdoche/ Thy works a Grand Tautology."

Finally, what we might confirm through Parmenides is that meaning isn't language, something lodged in the words; meaning is an emergent feature of language, somewhat as the software of mind is an emergent feature of the hardware of brain, though we can't yet locate the spot where biology turns into psychology. But I think Parmenides' postulate is a good description of what must go on at such a spot—that is, the "point" in the neuronal works where consciousness sorts things out in terms of elementary perceptual differences and similarities, deriving therefrom the all-important identification of parts and wholes that allows us to label the world. It is from this chemo-electric sorting that all meanings and thought about the world emerge. This is not to deny the equally plausible idea that meanings, having emerged from the hardware of language, might have an effect on the hardware itself, as we see in the spooky prospect of genetic engineering.

Tautologically speaking, then, meanings are always thefts. But they are not simple burglaries, things or ideas stolen outright from another

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thinker's bank of meanings and retained as such. They are always altered in the act of theft, as Francis Bacon, stealing a certain crimson from Velásquez, will alter its "meaning" by putting it beside a blue stolen from a Corot sky; or as I have just burgled a splendid phrase from William Gass—"the burglaries of meaning that symbols commit" (from *Finding a Form*)—and turned it to my own very different uses. What words (or paint, or sound) create is what Chalmers would call resolutional and intensity structures, cognitive hothouses where some implications may flourish and others won't. Meanings are very much like metaphors, those arch-thieves of the figural world that always leave tantalizing evidence at the scene of the crime about their "motive" but never enough to solve it to everyone's satisfaction. You and I may agree that a metaphor is "apt" but not necessarily about what the aptness is. For though there is a sameness in every human cortex, your sense of the intensity and resolution of a particular metaphor or meaning will differ in some degree from mine, or anyone else's, owing to inevitable *differences* in our mnemonic holdings. I speak primarily here of meaning involving attitudes, impressions, and emotions, rather than hard pragmatic meanings. Two plus two may still, always and everywhere, equal four, but "Susan is not a grasshopper" depends on a lot of things that aren't in the words of which the words themselves are only the site of a gathering of absences.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Album of Giles

STANLEY KAUFFMANN

I

I AM A MEMBER OF THE GARRICK CLUB IN LONDON. This came about because, in 1944, I met Giles Playfair in New York. Laura and I, lately married, were part of a small informal group of people interested in theater history. One of the group knew Giles, who had written a biography of the nineteenth-century tragedian, Edmund Kean. Giles was living in Manhattan where he had a wartime job with the British government. He and his wife, Carol, were invited to an evening with us, and they accepted. They were amiable enough, with only the merest touch of the visiting English author and his appropriate wife.

Not long afterward, the Playfairs moved to New Canaan in Connecticut, with Giles commuting to his job. In time our group was invited to a Saturday lunch in New Canaan. Laura and I were glad of it, though somewhat surprised. The Playfairs hadn't seemed especially taken with our group. Neither in fact were we; we had been thinking of dropping out. But we went along up there with the rest of the group, and the lunch was pleasant.

Laura and I were even more surprised when, a few weeks later, the Playfairs invited us up for a Saturday lunch by ourselves. This time an odd thing happened. Almost as soon as the four of us were together, we burst out nearly simultaneously with dislike of the other members of our group. A bond was forged.

Laura and I began to miss meetings of our theater group. We and the Playfairs spent evenings together in New York when Carol was in town. They became our closest friends.

Giles was short, a bit shorter than I am, and slightly tubby. Laura used to call him "my Toby jug." He wore his hair, which was dark, plastered in the sidewise way that English gentry still sometimes favor. His nose tipped slightly upward, as if designed to hold his glasses in

---

STANLEY KAUFFMANN, film critic for the *New Republic*, has contributed eleven previous Albums to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, three of which have appeared in *Albums of Early Life.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

place. His mouth had a slight downward cast even when he was not teasing. His mind scintillated. He had the most beautiful speech that I have ever heard, crystalline without affectation. When he spoke the word "dance," it floated. The name "Laura" sounded like a brook purling past.

He was working for the British Security Services in their Rockefeller Center quarters. He never discussed his work, then or until his death: he had signed a warrant of secrecy. He was in this New York job because the Japanese had invaded Malaya and taken Singapore. He had been there at the time, working for the Malayan Broadcasting Corporation. When war broke out in 1939, he had volunteered and been rejected because of his eyesight. He had joined the BBC propaganda service in London, and when this Singapore opening came along, he had asked to be sent there. Carol had insisted on going out with him. She had sent her young daughter, by a previous marriage, to stay with relatives in America. Just before we met the Playfairs, Giles had published a book called *Singapore Goes Off the Air*, about their difficult outbound journey from London to Singapore, their stay of only nine weeks before the Japanese arrived, their hazardous escape. When he and Carol reached New York, he had been given his present post.

Giles's first book, before the Kean biography and the Singapore account, was an autobiography, done when he was twenty-six. *My Father's Son* attempted, through a subjective view, to portray his father. Nigel Playfair, dead ten years before we met Giles, had been the artistic director of a celebrated London theater, as well as a prominent actor, and had been knighted for his achievements. Giles had grown up in and around his father's theater, the Lyric, Hammersmith, and had grown up even more markedly in the penumbra of his father.

But, despite some successful university acting and some flirtations with the theater, he had not himself aimed for a theater life. Possibly his father's position had diverted him more than it had encouraged him. Harrow had led to Oxford where he had taken a law degree. He became a barrister, practiced a while in an older man's office, then quit. He disliked the gap, as he saw it, between law and the actual lives of the people it dealt with. When his father died in 1934, Giles was already in a public relations job with a large corporation in Manchester. Also, he was the theater critic of a Manchester newspaper.

In the mid-1930s he married Carol. She was American-born but had been raised in England and had been an actress, in a small way, in London. She had been married twice before, to theater people, and the second man had fathered her daughter, Amanda.

Carol was very prematurely white-haired and emphasized it with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

powder. She was round-cheeked and dimpled and pretty. She suffered from agoraphobia. Sometimes she stayed in bed, reading, for two or three days, except when she got up to prepare meals.

In May of 1945 the European war ended, and so did Giles's job. He and Carol decided to stay in New Canaan for a time while Giles wrote some things he had in mind and while Amanda finished high school. As soon as Giles was staying at home all the time, Laura and I were invited up for a week. He had warned that he would be in his study during the day, working. I brought along a portable typewriter so that I could get on with my own work. We were both writing novels.

When the week was up, they invited us to stay on. We stayed three weeks. Giles typed in his basement study, I typed in our bedroom. Laura marched on with her second re-reading of *War and Peace.* Carol, with an extended agoraphobic attack, was in bed a good deal of the time, but she rose to take care of us all as if illness had to stand aside for serious matters. At five o'clock she would come out of the kitchen and call to me upstairs, to Giles downstairs. "Boys? Tea!" Upward inflection on the first word, maternal command on the second.

After tea Carol usually retired, and Giles and I often read to each other what we had lately written. Laura listened, sometimes commenting, trying not to compare it, I suppose, with Tolstoy. It was a well-knit three weeks.

II

Other weekends followed, other times in town. In New York the four of us sometimes went to plays; in New Canaan we often went to films, and a curious link was confirmed between Giles and me. From vastly different backgrounds, we shared enthusiasms and disgusts. My experience had been with American theater and with films from around the world. His had been mostly with British theater and American films. Laura said about us, "Peculiar. And nice." She, as it happened, frequently agreed with him and me.

I enjoyed the fact of the Oxford gent and the Manhattan cockney mourning together that the Goths were advancing everywhere, in theater and film, in the conduct of nations, in simple daily courtesy. Laura was right: our general agreements were peculiar. And nice. I was middle-class in a society where, hierarchically speaking, that term had little meaning. He was upper-class in a society where that term was significant. I thought of him as English, but he called himself British because his family had its roots in Scotland, in St. Andrews. I had never been abroad, but because of plays and books, because of the war just ended, I was besotted with England. And Giles was the very being

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Englishness for me, in honor and in snootiness, in reserve and in tantrums, the latter always in private and always over trifles.

He both fed my Anglophilia and teased it. He would drop a place name that I knew from Shakespeare or Dickens, mention that he had lunched or visited there, then would purse his lips and say, "Oh, of course, you don't know it. As yet." He used to groan at my income-tax story. My first book, after it appeared in America, had been published in Britain during the war. Through an error, I had overpaid British income tax on my royalties there. In 1944, while Britain was wracked with agonies, while buzz bombs were falling on London, the British Inland Revenue Service sent me a refund. Three pounds and seven shillings. I thought this a tremendous action, and apparently I often mentioned it. Whenever I did, especially if there were other people around, Giles would sigh loudly and say, "Oh, God, Stanners, not those bloody three pounds again." He began calling me Stanners fairly soon after we became friends. He coined names for some people. Carol, for an undisclosed reason, he called Tring. President Truman was Old Trubody. One reason my name stuck was because Laura liked it and adopted it. I was glad he never gave her a nickname because he spoke her own name so delicately.

Carol, when she felt able to stay out of bed, had plenty of stories about the London theater in the early 1930s and even more stories about herself and Giles. Once they had been on a walking trip in Andorra and had, late one day, wandered through a woods looking for an inn. When at last they found it, they had been told that there were bears in the woods they had just come through. Giles had blanched and said, "We might have been hugged."

There were matters about him that bothered me, as I'm sure there were for him about me. The product of a class society, he was never quite comfortable with a waiter, a maid, a train conductor. He always seemed to be restraining himself from being offhand with them. I used to nudge him about these matters, the British Liberal, the humanitarian, which he certainly was, so nearly dismissive of some people. His response was to slump down farther in his easy chair, fold his hands over his plump middle, and say, "Snips to you."

Yet I couldn't help being tickled by some of his small insistences. He wouldn't carry packages in public. He would not put anything in a side pocket of his jacket that would bulge and spoil the line, though he would stuff a large silk handkerchief into his breast pocket, sometimes into his left sleeve. When the jacket was single-breasted, it always had three buttons, and he would never fasten the top or bottom button. Once, before we all went to a party, I buttoned the bottom button on my three-button jacket. He stared. I laughed and relented.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Whenever he got a letter of any importance, particularly if it was about business, he crumpled it into a pocket so that, when he fished it out to show to me or anyone, it would look as if he thought it was negligible.

He pretended to be baffled by American pronunciations and locutions. Miami, for instance. Why weren't the two *i*'s pronounced alike? He scoffed at "advertisement" as it is pronounced here and thought it mad not to accent the second syllable. He detested the American theater's use of the term "director" for a profession that, still at that time, was called "producer" in Britain. He liked to pretend to get Americanisms wrong. "Get a load of that" became for him "Take a load of that."

Most of these crotchets were part of his teasing, which was one of his chief ways of having fun. Another way was imitations, at which he was clever. Thomas E. Dewey was one of his pets. Like hammer blows: "It's my tee good to be in Shih kah go again." But his best was Churchill, peering over his glasses, gumming words like a gaffer, with the *s* sounds coming out sideways.

All this flummery seemed to me a shell around a sadness. He never spoke of it. I inferred it but never doubted it, then or later. He was approaching middle age with, in his own eyes, too little to show for it. It was not all his fault, but that didn't matter. He was sad, too, that the world was changing, more and more quickly, and not in the beneficent ways that were once vaguely promised by the war.

Occasionally he disclosed a sentimental streak. Once, when Laura and I were in New Canaan, he came downstairs almost warily with a letter in his hand. "Take a load of that," he said and handed it to us. It was handwritten on heavy stationery that was edged in black and crested at the top. It was from Queen Victoria to Giles's grandfather, who, toward the end of Victoria's life, had been her family's gynecologist. Written across the top of the letter were the words "Burn this." The Queen inquired of Dr. Playfair about some female difficulty that a daughter was having. Giles walked up and down the room nervously while we read it. Then, as if ashamed of his soppiness and his bragging, he snatched it out of our hands and said, "*Do* let's have some Ping-Pong."

There was a Ping-Pong table in the garage, plenty of room for it because the Playfairs had no car. On the way downstairs I remarked on grandpa's disobedience to his queen. He hadn't burned the letter. "His Scottish blood, probably," said Giles. "Thought the family might sell it one day, I expect. Though we never did. Typical Playfairs."

He was surprisingly fast at Ping-Pong. He always beat me easily. When I missed a shot completely, not a rarity, he would pronounce one word as two. "Pa. Thetic." Laura gave him a much better game.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was a tennis player, was quick, and sometimes won. But Giles won more often. Even with her, he crowed silently. He would put down his paddle, fold his hands over his middle, and smile gloatingly.

We tried for revenge, sort of. We took him out to Ebbetts Field to see the Brooklyn Dodgers. We weren't big baseball fans, but we liked to see the Dodgers once in a while. We would go early, buy thick pastrami sandwiches with cole slaw in them at a delicatessen between the subway and the stadium, eat in the stands as we watched batting practice, then the game. When we invited Giles, he scoffed. Baseball was only the English schoolboy game of rounders, not in the same world with cricket. We dared him to come, and at last he accepted, a knowing victim.

Tacitly, the three of us agreed on our roles. Laura and I would be the red-blooded Americans, he would be the snooty Brit. When we were seated in the stands, he opened his pastrami sandwich. "Good Lord," he said. "Monstrous. How is one supposed to bite this, whatever it is, thing? I thought we were supposed to eat hot dogs."

"Not in Brooklyn," said Laura. A hot-dog vendor passed, and Giles looked at her questioningly. "Not the best people," said Laura. He appreciated the tease and bit his sandwich. He soon finished it.

We quickly gave up trying to explain the game to him, but every time we got a chance to yell, we seized it, all the conventional baseball-crowd yelling. He shook his head, as he was meant to do, at our vulgarity. The game went badly for the Dodgers that day. In the seventh inning they got their first hit, a measly single. The entire crowd leaped up and shouted. "That's Americans for you," said Giles, playing his part. "No self-control."

Some years later we got the chance to reverse roles with him when he took us to Lord's, the posh cricket ground in London. Tea. No pastrami.

III

He extended his game of bafflement by Americans. He interrupted work on his novel to write a short humorous piece about commercial jingles on the radio, contending that they confused him. For instance, a beer called Piel's had a jingle that went:

> Now demand it! Ask by name!
> Piel's light beer of Broadway fame.

Giles said that he heard:

> Nasty bandit! That's the name!
> Feels like beer of Broadway fame.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He showed the piece to two magazines, which declined it. Then he showed it to me. I thought it was bright but needed sharpening. I asked him if he would give it to me to do as I liked. By this time we knew each other well enough for me to propose such a thing and for him to accept it. I touched the piece here and there, re-typed it, and sent it, as from him, to the *Atlantic Monthly*, which was then markedly Anglophile.

A week later Giles called to say that the *Atlantic* had taken the piece. "Thanks," he said, as flatly as possible. This meant that he was grateful. He said that the magazine had asked for a brief biographical note.

I said, "Be sure to mention that you're writing a novel."

"Really?" He sounded faintly shocked but tickled by this glint of Yankee brass.

He did mention it, and by return mail he got a letter from the Atlantic Monthly Press asking to see the novel when it was ready or a piece of it now if he chose. He sent them a sizable chunk. They soon sent him a contract, and within weeks the head of the press and his wife were asking to visit the Playfairs on their way to New York. When I next saw Giles, he reported on the visit, one of the results of my suggestion, and said, "Well done, Stanners." I folded my hands on my stomach and gloated as he did at Ping-Pong. He sucked in his breath and shook his head, which is what he did to keep from laughing.

In those years, it seems now, we stored up experiences to serve as private signals later on. Once the four of us were invited to dinner by a couple we all knew fairly well, and our hostess served a fancy dish that had clearly cost her considerable work. When I next called Giles, I said I thought the dish was good, and he replied, "It might have been except for those whacking great potatoes." Our hostess was really fond of Giles and savored his oddities, so when I next spoke to her, I quoted this remark. She laughed, as I had hoped she would, and apparently laughed again when she quoted it back to Giles later on. A few days afterward, when I called him about something, he said, "I knew it. Whacking great potatoes. I knew you'd blab to her." I chortled, as I heard him suck in his breath and refrain from laughing at our three-cornered game. The phrase endured with us. Some thirty years later I got a cable from him on my birthday: "Happy birthday with whacking great potatoes."

Toward the end of the 1940s, Giles's mother came over for a month-long visit. While she was in New Canaan, Laura and I were invited for a weekend. Lady Playfair looked pretty much as I expected. She was small, trim, peppy. Her face was chiefly notable for its vivacity. Giles had warned us that she might be remote, which was how she tended to be with strangers, but she was warm with us from the first word.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lunch was amiable, naps were had, and at about four o'clock she asked me if I would care to have a walk before tea. Laura was still napping. Giles was obviously pleased that she had asked me, though he made an effort to hide it.

He had a walking stick, knobby, with a leather thong that fit around the wrist. She borrowed it, then she and I set out up a side road. She walked with the usual vigor of the British elderly, and I gave some thought to keeping up. The honor of my country seemed at stake.

She asked what I was doing these days, and I told her. I asked her about herself. I knew that she had been an actress before she married. Her name had been May Martyn, and I told her that I had seen it in some Edwardian programs. "Mm," she said, as if that were reasonable enough. I asked her about the London theater in those days, and she spoke about it bluntly but with a tinge of nostalgia. Henry Irving had been wildly overrated, but she missed his kind of theater.

She told me that she had been in the very first production of *Peter Pan*, as understudy for Nina Boucicault, the original Peter. Toward the end of the run, when Boucicault was out for a time, she had played Peter. Barrie had told her that in some ways he preferred her to Boucicault. "So did I," she said, twinkling.

Suddenly she said, "Tell me. About Giles."

I asked what she meant.

"Well, I *am* concerned about him." His life was unsettled, she thought. He had been brilliant at Oxford, had won various student offices, had acted excellently in Oxford productions, and had been much written about for those reasons and others. But he had chosen the law. Then he had given it up because he couldn't abide its injustice.

I nodded. He had sometimes talked to Laura and me about the law's harshness to the hopeless and hapless.

"A heart of cornmeal mush," she said. Then there was Manchester, then there was the war and Singapore and New York. Now New Canaan. Then what?

"Well, he's being a writer," I said. "You know he's writing a novel."

"Mm," she said, as if she thought this was not quite an answer. "He won't let me see any of it. Have you read it?"

"Most of what he's written. I like it."

"Yes," she murmured, almost abstractedly. She was quiet for a while as we walked. Then she said that, though of course she hoped the novel would turn out well, it didn't seem quite the right sort of work for him. She couldn't explain precisely, but she felt there was something that would be absolutely right for him and that he hadn't found

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it yet. As I had entertained a thought or two like that about myself, I felt almost too guilty to reply.

I never mentioned this conversation to Giles. Not ever.

Later that afternoon, when we were all having tea, I found a way to tease her, to show that I appreciated her confidence. Carol brought me my cup across the large living room. Lady Playfair, on the sofa, said, "Good heavens, what great distances you have in your houses out here."

"Lady Playfair," I said, "this isn't 'out here.' This is here."

She blushed and smiled, conveying in a way that she was glad to have had that walk with me.

We didn't see her again after that weekend. She went back to London and, in a few years, died.

Around 1950 Giles and Carol parted. It happened quickly. Laura and I, surprised, didn't even have a chance to say good-bye to Carol and Amanda before they returned to London. Giles never discussed the split except to say that it had been unpleasant. He saw Carol again in England only to deal with the divorce, but he kept in touch with Amanda. Many years later, long after Carol was dead, he visited Amanda and her children, then grown, in Australia. I still think of Carol sometimes, and her tenderness and her white hair.

The New Canaan house, which was rented, was given up. Giles was invited to stay in the nearby house of Mrs. Maxwell Perkins, widow of the celebrated editor of Fitzgerald and Hemingway.

Laura and I had lunched at the Perkins house along with Giles and Carol, had met the married Perkins daughters and their husbands, and had heard stories of Scott and old Hem, as Perkins had called him. Mrs. Perkins was another Anglophile and was delighted to flutter around Giles.

"She's sweet," said Giles to us, "but those stories about Max and Scott and Hem never end. Worse than your three pounds. And the praying!" Mrs. Perkins was a Catholic convert. "Incessant."

He worked on his book in a room in her house. He came into New York about once a week on some business or other, and we put him up. Our apartment was small, and we had no large sofa. We bought a cot, which he called a camp bed, and unfolded it in the living room when he needed it. He was always something of a bother, which he delighted to be and which Laura especially liked, too, most of the time. He pretended to incompetence in small things, which was only partly true, and Laura indulged him, sometimes shopping for items he wanted, such as a specific marmalade for breakfast. He borrowed a bathrobe of mine and always wore it to breakfast because his father had never dressed before breakfast, had always worn a dressing gown.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When Laura and I neared the point of exasperation, we reminded ourselves that we had spent numerous weekends in New Canaan, that we had once gone for a week, had stayed three weeks, and could have stayed longer if we had wished. Giles's attitude toward hospitality evidently was that friends stayed with friends, and asked favors of them, as much as was wanted, in the tacit understanding that the reverse was also true and in either case needed no discussion.

In January of 1951 Claude Rains, an actor I admired, arrived on Broadway in an adaptation of Koestler's *Darkness at Noon.* Giles came with us to see it. He had once told us that, when Rains was young, his father had given him some good roles. In 1924, when Giles was fourteen, Rains had directed a benefit matinee of Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* with a cast composed of children of well-known London theater people. Giles had played Crichton.

In the Koestler adaptation Rains was excellent. During the intermission we asked Giles to take us backstage after the play to meet him. He was reluctant. We urged. When the play was over, he said, "Oh, very well. But I know precisely what he'll say." He imitated Rains's gorgeous voice. "Giles, where in heaven's name did you drop from?"

We went around backstage, Giles gave his name to the doorman, and we were ushered into Rains's dressing room. He sat bare-chested before his mirror, taking off his makeup. The first thing he said was, "Giles, where in heaven's name did you drop from?"

Laura and I both laughed. Rains must have thought that Giles had brought along a couple of loons. But I saw why Giles had been reluctant to see him. Since they had last met, Rains had risen steadily. Giles had less to report.

IV

In May of 1951 his novel, *The Heart of Fame,* was published. It was the story of a celebrated English actor whose temperament was not theatrical, who could easily have lived a cozy suburban life, and who suffered in several ways, as did some around him, by choosing a theatrical career. The protagonist was based on Giles's godfather, Henry Ainley, an actor once famous for Shakespearean and romantic roles. Advance copies of the book had been sent to well-known actors for comment, and several had responded, Claude Rains and Basil Rathbone among them. But the reviews and sales of the novel were modest.

So the fate of the book didn't alter Giles's plans, already made, to move back to London. There he wrote for several journals on political and legal questions of the day, and he hooked up once again with the people who had sent him to Singapore. He became a BBC reliable.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Third Program often called him in for commentary, and for a time he had a weekly slot, which he treated like a magazine column, in which he talked about the theater or books or the press or whatever had provoked or pleased him that week.

A few months after he left, Laura and I went to Europe for the first time. I was then an editor in book publishing, and my firm sent me to London for three weeks on business. I arranged for a two-week vacation after that, and Laura came with me. Giles made sure that he was free in those two weeks so that he could drive us around Britain. Neither Laura nor I had a license then, but even if we could have driven, we would have wanted Giles with us. When my publishing business in London was finished, we rented a car and the three of us set off.

I've never seen anyone drive as he did. He huddled over the wheel as if he were continuously studying the pavement just ahead. Still, we moved right along. We headed north to Edinburgh, then on to St. Andrews. "Me ain country," he called it, though he hadn't been there very often. He showed us the Playfair Chapel in the Town Church and the Playfair plot in the Cathedral burial ground on a bluff overlooking the North Sea. His father and mother were buried there and some other family members. "I shall lie there one day," said Giles, almost happily. It was the oddest family tie I had ever encountered. The prediction didn't come true, but it was strangely wistful at the time.

We circled around through the Highlands and Glasgow and back through England and Wales. The weather turned warm. Giles was wearing a three-piece tweed suit, the only suit he had brought with him, and it became a torment. He took off the vest, but he wouldn't take off the jacket and he had no other trousers. I had none that would fit him. While he drove, he scratched his legs and grew grouchy. In response I grew grouchy, too. Laura scoffed at and scolded both and kept matters fairly placid.

The only time I ever saw him lose his temper in public was on this trip. We stopped in Stratford for a few days on our way to London, and in a restaurant there, crowded with tourists, he ordered sole. When it came, he said it wasn't sole, it was skate. "This is infuriating," he announced. He called the waiter back and complained, ringingly. The waiter, ignorant in the matter, offered to take the dish back. Giles waved him off. He just wanted the waiter to tell the manager that he wasn't fooling absolutely everyone. The waiter left, but the manager never appeared. Giles picked at his fish. "Wouldn't have happened before the war," he muttered.

I attributed his outburst to the tweed. Since he never wearied of teasing me about some slip or other, I kept on long afterward about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the tweed, the only suit he had brought for a summer trip. "Weather's changed in this blasted country," he would say. "Tweed was quite all right in summer before the war. Thousands wore it."

When Laura and I were back in New York, the second phase of friendship with Giles began, long periods of separation in which we had remarkably little sense of being separated from him. This curious feeling persisted right until his death in 1996. He and I wrote each other once in a while, particularly if one wanted to send the other something he had published, and we always felt as if we were continuing a conversation that had broken off the day before. The best thing about this feeling was that neither I nor Laura nor he ever mentioned it.

Yet, whenever I knew I was going to see him, in London or New York, I felt quietly excited. Quite apart from the fun, the teasing, the flicking through our past experiences like moneyed people reviewing their accounts, I could hardly wait to start the talk, the sheer talk, the arguments again. And there was a central matter. Seeing him was like taking an ethical shower. "Can't abide that chap," he would say of someone in the news, a figure in politics or theater or film whom I had been taking with some seriousness. Sometimes I would dispute his views and remain unswerved. Sometimes his reasons would scare me a little because I thought I ought to have seen them for myself. Whether we agreed or not on whatever it was, and we still thought alike on very many things, I had the sensation of being reminded that there were other values in the world besides those currently in vogue.

But his ethics could lead into a quite subtle sentimentality. In the early 1950s he was invited to take over the Royal Court Theater in London. This was the theater that, from 1904 to 1907, Granville Barker had run and that, during this time, had established Bernard Shaw's reputation. Not much of note had happened there lately, and the owner hoped to give the place a lift by engaging as manager the son of the man who had done wonders with the Lyric, Hammersmith, some thirty years before.

This was precisely what went wrong. Giles tried to run a theater modeled on his father's in tone and intent. Sentiment, of a sort, occluded values, and he completely disregarded the radically different atmosphere in London after World War II. His major production there was a play by two Americans whom Laura and I knew, a play that dealt with Ruskin's failed marriage and Millais's intervention. Laura and I were relieved that we weren't there to see the production. It didn't succeed.

The Playfair managerial career was brief. This, quite apart from the Ruskin play, seemed to us inevitable. We couldn't imagine him as a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prospering theater manager in the London of the 1950s. There were too many practices he couldn't have accepted, too many chaps he couldn't abide. Too little time for teasing.

Another career opened for him. I don't remember how it happened, but he got a teaching offer from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He spent most of 1953 and 1954 there, as professor of drama and director of plays, in one or two of which he also appeared. He had a hand in the production of *The Three Sisters* in a new translation by Randall Jarrell, who was a Greensboro colleague.

Giles came up to New York a few times from North Carolina, but he didn't talk much about the Chekhov. He did boast about his performance as the suave King Magnus in Shaw's comedy *The Apple Cart.* And he did go on about the elderly ladies in Greensboro who were apparently like Mrs. Perkins in their Anglophilia. Slumped in our biggest armchair, a drink on the side table, his glasses far down on his nose, his hands folded over his stomach, he said, "Of which, I assure you, I take every advantage." He smiled the Ping-Pong smile.

V

The first sign of physical decline came while he was at Greensboro. He suddenly lost the hearing in his right ear. "My man here says that an ear can go—boom—in only one way: through a hemorrhage," he wrote me. "And he says a hemorrhage either cures itself or is incurable. If he's right, there's no point in wasting money on further opinions. It's on that point that I'm waiting to hear from Bill W." Bill Williams was an Oxford chum who now practiced medicine in London. "But rest assured that if there's the slightest chance of becoming two-eared again I'll go after it."

No slightest chance arose. He saw Bill and specialists in London, but the ear never improved. Soon Laura and I more or less forgot about it. When we were with him, we took care to sit on his left side so that he could hear us plainly. Other than that, his hearing loss seemed only one more foible. We certainly didn't see it as a portent.

In the summer of 1954 he was back in London, in time to attend the trial of Fredric Warburg, my British publisher. Warburg was being criminally prosecuted because he had published my allegedly obscene novel *The Philanderer,* and Giles attended the trial in the Old Bailey with what he called a watching brief on my behalf. After Warburg was acquitted, Giles wrote an article about the case. Perhaps it was this visit to a law court, one of his few such since he left practice before the war, that re-heated his concern with the illogic and social clumsiness of law.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Such issues had recurred in our talks through the years, and his article showed that they still rankled. And more would come on this subject.

Meanwhile, I had a telephone call from the president of Williams College in Massachusetts. Somehow he had learned that I knew Giles, and he wanted Giles's address in London. Very soon after, Giles agreed to teach drama and theater at Williams, and he stayed there until 1963.

During his Williams years he began the series of five books for which he will possibly be best remembered, critiques of penal systems and of capital punishment. The first two books were collaborations with another old Oxford chum, Derrick Sington. Laura and I had met Derrick before the collaboration began. He had been a political journalist and now worked for the BBC. In the war he had been the officer in charge of the first British unit to enter Belsen and had been a prosecution witness at the trial of the Belsen personnel. He was more placid than Giles, less of a tease, but sympathetic and keen enough to make collaboration possible across the ocean. He and Giles wrote two books together, *The Offenders* and *Crime, Punishment and Cure.* Then Derrick died, quite unexpectedly. After a while, Giles continued alone through the years with three more books in this field. The subtitle of the first book could have been the rubric for all of them: *The Case Against Legal Vengeance.*

During those years Giles also published another theater biography. *The Prodigy* was the story of an early-nineteenth-century acting phenomenon, the boy who was a Shakespearean star, Master Betty. Giles dedicated the book to Laura and me. I had dedicated a novel to him several years earlier, and when it subsequently came out in a Swedish translation, his name appeared as Giles Flayfair. With the Master Betty book, Giles said he had been tempted to adjust my patronymic but desisted for Laura's sake.

In the summer holiday after his first Williams year, he was in London, and we saw him there. He told us that he had met a young American woman, a divorcée who lived just outside Williamstown with her infant son. He had needed a female lead for a play he was directing at Williams, which was then all-male, and had heard that this woman was a graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. He had invited her to play the role and, he said, she had done it quite decently. We knew from the casual way he talked about her, yet persisted in talking about her, that something was astir. A year or so later they were married.

Ann, notably younger than Giles, is petite, sparky, with many surprises, a chief one being that, under her breezy manner, lies wiry competence. A painter who did her portrait said that she made him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

think of Sam Weller, a comment that Giles liked to repeat, disavowing the cockney element, of course.

For some family reason, they were married in New York, and the night before the ceremony, Ann stayed with us. We had disposed of the cot that Giles used, so she slept on the living-room floor. I said that, after a night on our floor, even a wedding night with Giles would seem an improvement. She thought this hilarious.

After a few years their son Piers arrived and then their daughter Sanchia. From time to time we visited them, and Ann's first son, in their large Williamstown house while Giles got on with his teaching and productions and the research for his penal books. Besides much correspondence, this research entailed visits to prisons here and in Britain and elsewhere, which led to friendships by mail with some prisoners who were serving life sentences. Yet for all this activity, organized and fruitful, he never lost his air of upper-class abstraction, of expectation that others would smooth paths for him.

Occasionally that was his trump card. One Christmas holiday Laura and I went up to Williamstown for a week's stay and arrived at the Springfield railroad station late on a snowy night. Giles was there, bundled, with their little car. As we started, he huddled over the wheel as usual and said, "Damned lucky if we get there. Been having hellish trouble with this wretched car." I took this for a tease or his habitual fretting, but about ten minutes out of Springfield, the motor died. I was furious. We had just had a long train trip. It was late, and it was cold. Why couldn't he have had the car tended to? Laura, reading my mind, silenced me with a look.

On a knoll above the road was a house with lighted windows.

"I'll just see what I can do," said Giles, getting out.

"Want me to come with you?" I asked sulkily.

"No, that's all right," said Giles. We watched his bundled figure waddle up the driveway to the house. He knocked and was admitted.

In what seemed a very short time, compared to what I expected, he waddled down again. "All arranged," he said as he slid back into the car. "Quite a nice woman. Phoned up several garages till she found one that would come along at this hour. Gave me coffee, too."

I gaped. "How in the world did you get all that done so quickly?"

"I may not be able to do much," said Giles, "but I do know how to look helpless."

VI

In 1961 Adolf Eichmann was tried in Jerusalem, and Giles wrote an article about it. It wasn't a report because he wasn't there, although he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would have liked to have been. It was a moral critique, a plea to the Israeli government to put aside vengeance, to set an example for the world by declining to execute Eichmann, by imprisoning him and studying him.

It was the instance in extremis of Giles's opposition to capital punishment. A typical Playfair position, I said to him. He liked to commit himself to the impossible, to the theater of his father's day, to the Liberal Party in England, to the rationalization of the penal system, and the absolute abolition of the death penalty.

"Oh, so you think the death penalty is civilized?"

"Not exactly," I said. "I think it might well be abolished—as soon as Eichmann is executed."

"Precisely." He nodded. "Just one more exception. Then another and another. And then we're right back where we started."

He sent his article to the *New Republic.* They accepted it and featured it on the cover, but it drew relatively little comment. Apparently readers treated it as an aberration. Shifting swiftly to Giles's side, I became angry at our society's dismissal of the rare person who doesn't measure principles by practicality.

In 1963 Giles left Williams, chiefly because he and Ann wanted to raise their children in England. They moved from her spacious house outside Williamstown to a small house in Chiswick, an outer borough of London not far from Hammersmith where Giles's father had flourished and where there is a Nigel Playfair Avenue. Giles kept on working at his books and his articles and his BBC broadcasts. Laura and I kept on with our visits at least once a year, more often if we could make it, especially when Giles and Ann were unable to come our way.

It stands out in memory that we didn't meet in 1966 because he was not in New York during my short stay that year as the theater critic of the *New York Times.* He wrote me when I was appointed to the job. He congratulated me, of course, and said some gratifying things about my qualifications. Then he said, "But if you are still in that job a year from now, you will have failed." I was a bit nettled by the briskness of the remark, but I knew what he meant. I certainly made no conscious effort to satisfy him. I followed my own configurations. But, as it happened, I lasted eight months. Thinking of Giles's letter, Laura and I had a small, bitter laugh.

Whenever we were in London, Giles took me to lunch at the Garrick. He had long been a member, like his father before him. Among the many theater portraits on the club walls was one of his father as Tony Lumpkin in *She Stoops to Conquer.* At first Laura was irked when Giles and I withdrew to the all-male precinct. But our Garrick lunch gave her a chance to see Ann alone. I was slightly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

embarrassed by the club's male rule, but I couldn't help loving the place, remembering who had been there, not just the memorable theater and film people but the eminences in every profession for the past century or more. It was a perfect stimulant for my sorts of romance.

One day in the late 1960s when Giles and I were lunching there, he said, "I've been thinking, Stanners. You ought to be a member. You could be. You should be."

I asked if that was possible since I lived elsewhere.

He said there was a category for such. All candidates went through the same election process, but a member could be what they called a supernumerary. This theater term applied to those members who lived more than a hundred and fifty miles from London and visited the club no more than fourteen times a year. Lower dues. I asked Giles to put me up.

Election was a carefully preserved antique rite. Giles wrote my name in a ledger in the Lounge and signed under it. Bill Williams, his physician friend, signed next, to second the nomination. In the weeks, months, years thereafter, members sometimes looked through the ledger and, if so moved, signed a candidate's page. When a certain number had happened to look through the ledger and had happened to sign, the candidate was then voted on by the General Committee. My own election took, I think, four years. Bill Williams congratulated me on the speed with which I had made it.

I had a letter from the secretary of the club informing me of my election and asking me to furnish him, as all members did, with a photograph. "Informal and amusing photographs are preferred," he said. I replied that I had no other kind.

That was in 1973. Earlier, in 1971, Giles's life had changed. He had the first of his strokes, the first of a long, cruel series. Ann wrote us about it and asked us not to mention it to anyone. When we read the letter, Laura said, "The ear." We assumed that the stroke was some sort of sequel to the ear trouble nearly twenty years before. Giles had paid no attention to the matter since then. He ate and drank what he liked, not in excess but with a ridicule of diet, which he thought an American fetish. I haven't the slightest idea of whether he could have prevented that first stroke or the ones that followed, but I wished then that I could be angry at him for not taking better care.

A few months after the first stroke we were in London, and he was fine, completely recovered. I asked him what it had felt like. "Very odd," he said. "I was at the club for lunch. I felt as if I had suddenly become drunk. I'd had only a sip or two of Chambéry." His favorite aperitif. "Suddenly I began to reel a bit."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Did you ask for help?"

"No, too much fuss. I just got myself downstairs, and Cyril called a taxi for me." Cyril was the famously whiskered porter. "Brought me right out here. Damned expensive, too."

Ann had phoned Bill Williams who had come at once. After examining him, Bill had said, "You won't believe this at the moment, but you're going to be perfectly all right."

This was true for a while.

VII

I lost count of the number of strokes that Giles had during the next twenty-five years. It wasn't very long before they could no longer be kept secret. The strokes never affected his mind, but they gradually impaired his body. After one of them had made his speech a trifle hesitant, Bill Williams sent him a speech therapist. A speech therapist for Giles. This seemed to me a small proof of the existence of God, for who else could have been capable of such an irony? His speech recovered, but now he could get nervous among people who were not close friends. Once, at a dinner party at our place, he froze in the middle of a sentence, and, with an upward toss of his hands and a smile, he gave up for the rest of the evening.

He continued to write, though eventually with help. Ten years or so after his first stroke, he couldn't type much and had difficulty in scrawling. For a while he hired a typist. Then he dictated to Ann. She helped him to get several books down on paper. There was a novel. There was a book on terrorism that severely criticized British actions in Ireland, both as historical causes of terrorism and as prolongations of it.

And there was a book called *A Century of Monsters: A Reappraisal of the More Notorious Murder Cases During the Past 100 Years.* He examined the prejudicial effect of the coarse term *monster.* Among the radical ideas he proposed for the treatment of such murderers: "I am suggesting that a 'monster,' instead of being carefully watched to prevent him from committing suicide and so escaping punishment here on earth, should on the contrary be permitted to take his own life in as dignified a way as possible." Those who chose not to do this would be confined in a special mental hospital for observation and experiment in treatment. "That programme would at least offer hope of a medical breakthrough, and that could mean an end to the long story of horrendous crime. Surely, it is a way which a civilized society should follow."

Reading over some of these writings lately, I realized how thoroughly peculiar his suggestions were, simply because he proceeded on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the assumption that others might be interested in cracking heavy molds of social behavior, in applying reason and compassion, in moving toward the idea that always tugged at him, the need for civilization to become civilized. None of these books found a publisher.

As he sat there, increasingly immobile in his big chair in his little house, that chair became a kind of heater on which he percolated. He brewed political angers. He loathed Margaret Thatcher for her preening magnification of smug shopkeeper virtues. He supported the miners' strike that she caused in 1984 and, as I recall, wrote strong letters to the press. If he had been physically able, he would have been on the BBC about it.

It became more and more difficult for him to manage his body. In the first years of his illness, he put on some weight as a result of sitting so much, but in the last years he shriveled. After one visit, Laura said to me, "My old Toby jug. Gone." He never lost his hair. It turned gray, then white, but it never thinned. Mine both grayed and thinned, and he got some gloating out of this which, as things were, I was glad of. He never lost his appetite nor his interest in wine. He and Ann came to America at least once a year when Piers and Sanchia had married and were living here, and there was always at least one big meal, with Giles relishing away.

It's astonishing to remember how much he and Ann traveled, especially since he could walk less and less well. Ann had to make particular arrangements for him at airports and on planes. Yet they spent a winter in Capetown, a winter in Argentina, they visited Grenada shortly after the American incursion. All these trips, though holidays, were motivated by his political curiosity.

He and I usually telephoned each other on our birthdays. When we finished these calls, and at other partings, too, we both said, "Cheerybye," a word we had adopted from a twerpy character in Evelyn Waugh. On my last birthday before his death, I answered the telephone and got birthday greetings from John Major, a mimicking of voice and accent that must have cost Giles a week's energy to prepare. It was much more subtle than his Churchill and, because of his state, a more considerable coup.

This was especially true because four or five months earlier he had almost died. He and Ann had been visiting Piers in upstate New York when Giles had suddenly collapsed. He was taken to a local hospital unconscious. Ann told us later that she thought he was gone. When he came to, she was relieved that he was not a vegetable, she said, something that she feared for him more than death. When we visited them at Piers's house, Giles and I had as always a chance for a private chat. This was something that, I think, Ann and Laura always made possible.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I asked him if he had felt anything while he was out.

He said, "Nothing. Absolutely nothing. No sensation, no nightmares, nothing. It's as if ten or twelve hours were missing from my life. I shall try to make them up."

I said that his refusal to die was, among other things, sheer perversity.

He folded his hands over his now-flat stomach and smiled the Ping-Pong smile. "It *is* perverse."

During those last years, something in me made me see his condition figuratively. His slowly shrinking body was a figure of the shrinking of so much in the world that he cared about. I saw him, or thought I did, or wanted to think I did, being distilled to a quintessence of large and lesser disappointments.

I thought of his mother.

The last time we visited Giles and Ann, which was in London two weeks before he died, he and I had our usual private chat. He wouldn't go to the club anymore. He could scarcely walk at all, and though I could have helped him up the grand stairs, he didn't want to be seen this way. His body looked like a wisp, a fallen leaf past autumn. But he kept our talk lively. Some of the fun persisted.

I mentioned that, in the coming spring, I would be teaching a graduate seminar in Shaw at a university in New York.

"Ah," he said. "Including *Caesar and Cleopatra*, I trust."

"Not one of my absolute favorites," I said, "but I'll tell them it's one of yours and you ordered it."

He nodded, as if to acknowledge that I was merely observing decorum.

Laura and I hadn't made much of our partings with him in later years. We didn't want to behave as if we thought we might never see him again, though it was always in our minds. So, when we left, Laura just bent down over his shrunken form in the big chair and, as always, kissed his cheek. He blinked a couple of times. I said, "Cheery-bye," but he didn't repeat it. He put out his hand and grasped mine more tightly than he had ever done and said, "Good-bye, Stanners." By the time we were out in the street, before we had climbed into our waiting taxi, he had flicked on the television with his remote control and was watching the stock market reports. I liked that.

A couple of weeks afterward, he and Ann, along with a nurse and a wheelchair, took the Channel train for Paris. He had wanted to try that train, and Ann, for all her travels, had never been to the Louvre. The first morning in Paris she went to spend the whole day at the Louvre and left Giles in the nurse's charge. The nurse wheeled him along the Seine for an hour or so, then they had lunch. It was a lovely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lunch, said the nurse, smoked salmon and a good bottle of white wine. As she was wheeling him out of the restaurant, he had his last seizure.

Ann, consulting with Piers and Sanchia, decided against St. Andrews. The family plot was already crowded. Giles's two brothers had preceded him. Besides, this was Paris, which he adored. He might have preferred St. Andrews, thought Ann, but the idea of Paris as resting place might have struck him as quite smart.

She arranged for burial in the Cimitière de Montmartre, not far from the grave of the actor-dramatist-filmmaker Sacha Guitry. A year or so earlier Giles had played a Guitry recording for me, something from a 1920s operetta about a duke and a milliner. Giles had tried to hum along with the tune.

As Giles had requested, Ann put his obituaries in his coffin.

Within a month Ann sent me the cuff links that she had given him as a wedding present. This was her idea, not a bequest. I bought some shirts with French cuffs so that I could use the links. I don't know how often Laura and I will get to London from now on, but I'll keep up my membership in the Garrick.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poems

FREDERICK MORGAN

To Nancy

For twenty years or more, dear friend,
you've known the worst and not complained
but held to your calm chosen ways
with elegance and grace.

Courage as a state of mind
is tending to small things at hand
and this you've done so skilfully
you've taught us all to see

how subtle textures, muted tones
give meaning to our tranquil rooms,
how one deft touch of color may
secure the brilliant day—

and how in a life's ambiguous weave
of alternating joy and grief
even the darkest strands of all
may be made beautiful.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Friend

I think of you this winter noon
sun glinting from our icy streets
and wonder at life's chances, how
each day renews the pangs of loss

for those, like you, who year by year,
while others fawned and bent the knee,
held to a difficult true course,
learning too late the rules had changed.

You lost it all—but still endure
in some strange latitude of time
walking a seacoast strewn with wrecks
unpitied and unpitying,

and if you signal me, it's from
a past perhaps that never was
wherein you're gloriously at home
foretelling our bold destinies—

foretelling, too, another life,
the one that never came about,
in which you gaily won it all
and never learned to fear or doubt.

✪ FREDERICK MORGAN is co-editor of the *Hudson Review*. His most recent book is *Poems for Paula*, published by Story Line Press.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Purse

ROBERT CORDING

As if everything she needed to save herself
were within her reach and all she had to do
was piece together the clues inside
her purse, she hovers over the kitchen table
like some necromancer, hour by hour
removing combs and loose coins, a set of keys,
glasses and compact, shiny lipstick cases,
a wallet of pictures, each thing held up
to the light the way a child holds up the world's
strangeness, and then placed on the table,
arranged and rearranged, her children
and grandchildren laid out like a tarot deck,
the coins and keys like compass points.

Her son can plead *no mom, please, please stop*;
he can pray for a God to come and in one
pure word restore his mother's stricken brain;
he can whisper, *I love you*, meaning
I don't know what to do anymore, but he cannot
take the purse from his mother who carries it
to the bathroom and sleeps with it by her side.
He cannot understand why his mother,
lost now in the same world in which she knew
every turn of the local roads, keeps mapping
that trail of lipstick cases and keys
not even she can read; nor why, after thinking
has ended, after each of her efforts
satisfies nothing, the mind keeps following
its ever-restless hunger for some incomprehensible
and inexpressible order, some abracadabra
required to pass from this world into the next,
into the stillness of death's vacant relief.

✪ ROBERT CORDING is a Professor of English at Holy Cross College. His books of verse are *Life-List, What Binds Us to This World,* and *Heavy Grace.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Teaching American History

The heated debate over the National History Standards has highlighted the larger question of What history should our children learn? Should this history feature the patriotism, heroism, and ideals of the nation? Or should it feature the injustices, defeats, and hypocrisy of its leaders and dominant classes? It is easy enough to answer that it ought to teach both, but, in the workaday business of teaching history, as the National History Standards themselves showed, this is more easily declared than done. Behind the question of What history should our children learn? is the question of what ought to be the emphasis of that history: success or failure, victory or defeat, ideals met or ideals betrayed? Has the United States been one of the great historical success stories in human history, or has it been instead a story of one opportunity after another lost? What history, again, should our children learn?

We have asked eleven historians to take up this question in a response of roughly a thousand words.

WILLIAM CRONON

The angry arguments surrounding publication of the National History Standards in 1994 were disheartening for many of us who care about the state of American history in our schools and in the nation at large. For conservative critics, the Standards were a case study in political correctness, paying altogether too much attention to the histories of women, peoples of color, and members of the working classes while ignoring, they thought, the more uplifting tales of great ideas and great men—political leaders, inventors, and other heroic figures—that built a democratic nation and created a free economy. For those on the left, these conservative attacks were themselves a symbol of how the phrase "political correctness" could be used to tar and discredit a generation of social historical scholarship that sought to be more inclusive and do more justice to those whose stories have not usually made much of a dent on history textbooks. The Standards quickly became little more than an occasion to score debater's points against one's ideological enemies. The actual state of historical knowledge among America's schoolchildren (to say nothing of college students and the public at large) seemed to vanish as an object of concern or discussion.

In fact, though, what is most interesting about the National History Standards is not their ideological baggage, however much they may or may not lean to the left or the right. Much more remarkable is how optimistic they are—one might even be tempted to say how utopian they are—about what the students in American schools can be expected to know of their nation's past. According to the Standards, twelfth graders should be able to provide answers to queries such as these: "Compare the grievances of the 'Whiskey Rebels' to those of the Regulators, Paxton Boys, and Shaysites." "Was Jackson or Calhoun more in line with the principles of Jefferson and Madison during the nullification crisis?" "What do . . . architectural layouts and pictures of interior rooms tell about lifestyles, class differences, and gender roles during the Victorian era?" "How did the Supreme Court's decision

✪ WILLIAM CRONON is Frederick Jackson Turner Professor of History, Geography, and Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the author of, among other books, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in Heart of Atlanta v. United States (1964) use the commerce clause of the Constitution to expand the scope of the Civil Rights Act?" And so on. These are fascinating, important questions no matter what ideological stripes one wears . . . but does anyone seriously imagine that the average twelfth grader in even a good American high school possesses the nuanced historical knowledge necessary to make sense of them? I've known more than a few history graduate students who would tremble in the face of such questions.

The problem with history teaching in American schools is in fact both deeper and simpler than the debate over the History Standards has usually acknowledged. What it comes down to is just this: the past is not a living reality for most American children, any more than it is for many American adults. Questions like the ones above are premised on the highly dubious assumption that students actually care about the Whiskey Rebels or the commerce clause or the layout and design of Victorian parlors . . . and most do not. In order for them to care, they must first have had some kind of encounter with history that is compelling enough to make the dead past live again. For that is what good history is: a profoundly creative and contested act of recovery and revival that persuades those who experience it that a time and place they can never know directly or inhabit at firsthand is nonetheless endlessly engaging and profoundly important. Without this most basic lesson of all—that the past matters—even an ambitious set of "standards" (whatever their politics) will founder on the rocks of boredom and indifference.

We can argue all we want about whether children should first learn the stories of heroic nation-building, democratic institutions, and industrial growth that are the traditional staples of schoolbook history, or whether they are better off learning about the struggles of oppressed peoples and the injustices that are also part of our national heritage. But it's a false choice. Any adequate history of the United States must surely grapple with all of these things, for they are integral parts of the same past and can hardly be understood in isolation from each other. The more important problem, as any good history teacher knows, is that abstractions like "heroic nation-building" and "struggles of oppressed peoples" (to say nothing of even more inert words like "industrialization" or "modernization" or "economic growth") can be pretty dry dead stuff unless students discover windows through which to view them as gritty, complex realities that they themselves might have lived.

What liberals and conservatives both sometimes seem to forget is that different students need different windows to discover these past realities. For some, tales of technological progress and democratic nation-building will be more compelling; while for others, tales of oppression and struggles for social justice will bring the past to life more quickly. My own teaching practice is to use every available window that works, for I need all the allies I can get to overcome the indifference that too many students bring into the classroom. If social oppression works for one, I can get from there to democratic institution-building with no problem, and vice versa as well. The real challenge is to make entry somewhere into a past worth caring about for whatever reason. Unaccustomed to reading as a welcome form of recreation, raised on the virtual reality of videos and computer games, and perhaps even doubtful that their own generation faces any issues momentous enough that they too might be capable of "making history," today's students can perhaps be forgiven for having more trouble than their parents or grandparents in viewing the past as "real." I fear that standardized history requirements cannot by themselves solve this sense of historical unreality. What is needed are compelling stories and gifted teaching of a kind that can't easily be captured in "standards."

"What history should our children learn?" They should learn what is not at all obvious to them: that people now long dead were once profoundly and passionately alive. They should learn that the past is the place from which we came, each of us arriving in the present via different pathways even as we and our ancestors eventually found ourselves sharing (and sometimes fighting over) the common ground we now inhabit together. They should learn that the past is a foreign country, a land whose inhabitants made livings and spoke languages and held ideas far different from our own—indeed, so very different that only a great act of historical imagination can help us see the distance we have traveled in our journey away from their time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And as for politics, I don't know whether it's liberal or conservative to believe that students should learn that the United States has been a crucible in which peoples from all over the world have met and fought and killed each other but also where they worked together and cooperated to uphold basic notions of fairness, and dignity, and equal justice before the law that are both the glory and the shame of this nation. Students should learn that not all have shared equally in the American dream, that not all have dreamed that dream in the same ways . . . but that dreaming great dreams has been an essential part of our national story. They should learn that Americans have much to be proud of in their past and not a little to regret as well.

Most of all, though, they should learn that the past was a place so vibrant and full of possibilities that one can spend one's whole life wandering its corridors without exhausting the stories and meanings it has to offer. They should learn that worlds gone by and now seemingly vanished nonetheless still haunt our own, and that we cannot hope to understand ourselves if we fail to remember the many contradictory lessons these ghosts hold out to us. They should learn that history matters.

JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS

"If we are to boast of our best, we must repent of our worst." Thus spoke G. K. Chesterton, who was explaining why the English should own up to what their people had done to the Irish. The same advice could be offered to the American people and particularly their president, who seems to want to apologize about everything except his own peccadilloes. Should America apologize for slavery? Those who balk at the idea usually insist that they were not around at the time and could not possibly have promoted or prevented the institution. But, as Chesterton noted, if we refuse responsibility for history on such grounds we can scarcely take pride in a past that was also not of our own making. As a teacher of American history, I do take pride in the achievements of America and have no trouble identifying with generations of past intellectuals whose class and ethnicity are far remote from my ancestry. But with the joy of pride comes the responsibility of acknowledging the country's shortcomings and human violations. Chesterton called his essay "Paying for Patriotism."

When considering the new social history that has pervaded the document National Standards for History in the Schools, Chesterton may need to be revised: If we are to boast of our worst, we must trash our best. Thus the Standards spend far more space and time on slavery than on the Constitution, a conservative document whose historical significance would prove far more liberating than the radicalism so dear to historians of the sixties generation. The modern civil rights movement, the women's movement, the gay and lesbian movement, and other emancipatory causes would be unthinkable without the Constitution's equal protection of laws and the Court's mandating non-discrimination in hiring, admissions, residential ordinances, contracts, and the like.

"Multiculturalism," writes Nathan Glazer, "is the price America is paying for its inability or unwillingness to incorporate into its society African Americans [as] it has incorporated so many groups." Unwillingness? As far back as the early sixties, Black Studies Programs were established on numerous campuses in response to demands made by African Americans. And the same rationale Glazer uses now was used thirty-five years ago.

The entry of African Americans, Native Americans, women, and various ethnic minorities into the teaching and writing of American history has been hailed as a victory for multiculturalism and the cult of diversity. Such new subjects are welcomed, but all talk of multiculturalism may be mere verbiage. What has been going on in the academy is not multi-anything but instead a debilitating monoculturalism that results in a specialization and fragmentation in which each department or program does its own thing. And new departments and programs are established along with their perks for the same reason that Willy Sutton robbed banks: that's where the money is.

This problem, scarcely addressed by historians, is even celebrated as a solution in Law-

✪ JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS's article "The National History Standards" appeared in the Autumn 1996 AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rence Levine's *The Opening of the American Mind.* Because the campus is now receptive to an increasingly complex and multi-ethnic student population, does it follow that the American mind is more responsive to genuine difference and diversity? It may be the other way around, that we are witnessing the triumph of solipsism, a state where the self desires to experience only itself and remains uninterested in any other academic topic. While multiculturalists sing their own praises for "opening" up to this or that, they do not seem to be troubled by what one scholar has described as the "staggering decline in the teaching of a second language" in the colleges and universities. How can one study other cultures without having at least a preliminary knowledge of their languages? We are told that our new multi-ethnic environment requires us to "stretch the boundaries of our understanding," but the author of such advice appears to accept the narrowing of those boundaries by endorsing a curriculum that represents little more than micro-specialization based more on ethnic identity than intellectual ability. Rather than expanding the horizons of knowledge, multiculturalism lets a hundred fragments bloom, each in its own garden.

The advocates of the new history assume that critics like me wish to return scholarship to the older schools in which the voice of white European males dominated and everyone else remained excluded. On the contrary, I seek to see historiography not go backward but advance forward to the point that it leaves behind the sixties Marxism that has proven to be an albatross to critical thinking. An example of this academic Marxism is the recent *Why Do Ruling Classes Fear History? And Other Questions* by Harvey J. Kaye, who tells us in the book that he served as an advisor to the Standards project. Ironically, in America it is precisely the ruling classes who support the teaching of history no matter how politically correct and slanted toward the left. The wealthy Bradley Foundation established the National Council for History Education, which in turn endorsed the History Standards. The Ford Foundation has given piles of money for programs in black history and gay and lesbian studies. Power elites support affirmative action, and so it goes.

What is wrong with the new history is not that it is radical but that it is so nauseatingly shallow and sentimental. Get a whiff of the stale odor of one of Kaye's passages:

> The American Revolution and war for independence; the populism of Jacksonian politics; the Civil War and the ensuing abolition of slavery; the campaigns for women's suffrage and equality; the many generations of farmer and labor movements and Black struggles for survival, freedom, and justice: the first two hundred years and more of our history can be read as a narrative of continuous efforts *from the bottom up* to make real the aspiration that "We, the People" shall rule.

This "We Shall Overcome!" rhetoric is so far removed from the actual processes of history that Alexander Hamilton would have called it a "lullaby." If blacks, women, farmers, and laborers had to wait to be liberated "from the bottom up," they would still be waiting for history to make its move. Most of the groups specified above were at cross-purposes with such a diversity of aims and clashing interests, so that the rule of one often meant the subordination of the other. "Were the people to possess the additional advantages of local governments chosen by themselves," observed James Madison, "who could collect the national will and direct the national force?" Hamilton and Madison saw what Karl Marx himself saw but Marxist historians ignore: people move not together in concert but apart from one another in conflict. No wonder the ruling classes have no fear of history when we have such authors writing in the name of poor Marx. Although "We, the People" begins the Preamble of the Constitution, there is no reference to the phrase in the *Federalist,* whose authors knew a fiction when they saw it and knew there could be no redemption through illusion.

ERIC FONER

The recent emergence of history as a subject of public debate came as a great surprise, at least to historians. During the 1990s, it sometimes seemed, one could scarcely open a

---

✪ ERIC FONER, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, is the author of, most recently, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

newspaper without encountering bitter controversy over the teaching and public presentation of the American past—from whether the Columbus quincentennial of 1992 should be a source of national pride or shame to disputes over the National History Standards, the Enola Gay exhibition, and, most recently, a proposed national apology for slavery. This surprise shows how ignorant historians tend to be of their own history. In every country, versions of the past provide the raw material for nationalist ideologies. In the United States, calls for a more "patriotic" history have mounted at times of nation-building (such as the first half of the nineteenth century) and of perceived national fragmentation (such as the present decade, with its widespread concern over multiculturalism and mass immigration).

Many American historians have responded to the nation's call, often with unfortunate consequences. In the nineteenth century, historians such as Francis Parkman and George Bancroft created a narrative of national progress that had no place for Indian tribes, African Americans, or the Spanish and French-derived cultures of the trans-Mississippi West, since the American love of liberty was said to derive entirely from Anglo-Saxon sources. During World War I, historians churned out government-sponsored tomes that demonstrated, for example, the "common" ideals of Cromwell, Rousseau, and Jefferson by way of constructing a historical lineage for the Anglo-French-American alliance.

When I attended Long Beach High School in the New York City suburbs during the 1950s, the redoubtable Mrs. Bertha Berryman taught what might be described as a sanitized Cold War version of history. The United States, she explained, had begun perfect and had been improving ever since. Slavery was an unfortunate blemish, but most slaves were happy and well treated, and at any rate giving blacks the right to vote during Reconstruction was the worst mistake of our entire past. We learned a great deal about presidential administrations, but nothing about the rich history of dissent and social movements. We studied "how a bill becomes a law," learning the intricacies of the congressional system of committees and sub-committees, yet somehow never heard about lobbyists, influence peddlers, and campaign funders.

The problem with this history was not simply that it was grievously incomplete, but that it left students utterly unprepared to confront American reality. The civil rights revolution, divisions over Vietnam, Watergate—these seemed to spring from nowhere, without discernible roots in the American past.

Changes in the present always produce changes in the way the past is understood—witness the rewriting of history now under way in Russia and South Africa. There is nothing unusual or sinister in the fact that the social upheavals of the 1960s spawned the rise of the "new history," which greatly expanded history's subject matter by bringing the experience of previously neglected groups to the forefront of scholarship. Nor can the deficiencies of present-day scholarship be solved by returning to an earlier historical narrative, as many critics desire. Lest the reader think I exaggerate, I recommend a perusal of *Let Freedom Ring*, an outline of American history issued by the Family Research Council in order to counteract the controversial National History Standards. It is modeled, it proudly proclaims, on the New York State history curriculum of 1963, before the teaching of history was ruined by "political correctness."

Whatever the outcome of the present debates, one hopes they increase public interest in and understanding of history. However, this will not happen if the issues are misconstrued, as they have been in the question posed for this forum. The question presents as alternatives elements that are symbiotically related to one another.

Let me illustrate by reference to my own writing. I am at work on a book about the evolution of the idea of freedom in the United States. Nothing could be more central to our "national ideals" than freedom. Surely, here is a common theme of American history and a cause for celebration. Yet freedom—like other national ideals—is not a fixed set of ideas inherited from England and institutionalized by the founding fathers. It is a persistent source of conflict, whose definition has changed over time and whose meaning has been profoundly affected by the struggles of "groups who have felt themselves far off American history's main track" to gain their full rights. The meaning of American freedom has been constructed not only in congressional debates and political treatises, but also on plantations and picket lines, in parlors and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on plantations and picket lines, in parlors and bedrooms. Frederick Douglass, Eugene V. Debs, and Margaret Sanger—the kind of individuals whose highlighting in the National History Standards so alarmed critics—are its architects as well as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln.

One cannot understand the course of American history without appreciating how our very "national ideals," the basis, supposedly, of a sense of commonality whose absence is today much lamented, were themselves historically constructed on the basis of exclusion and difference. The founders proclaimed America an asylum for liberty yet, in the first naturalization law, in 1790, limited the process of emigrating from abroad to whites. Nonwhites were not simply "sufferers." Standing outside the boundaries of the nation's "imagined community" (in Benedict Anderson's phrase), they were invisible to those assaying the nation's future. Which is the real "national ideal"—the principle of universal liberty or freedom's actual restriction to an entitlement of whites? Perhaps the answer is both.

Rather than carping about the "new history" or advocating a return to the teachings of four decades ago, those who desire accounts of "heroism and national ideals" should produce them and submit them to the judgment of their scholarly peers. In other words, they should contribute to the ongoing process of historical interpretation and discovery and thus enhance the never-completed process of formulating a narrative of the American past with room for good and bad, heroes and sufferers, and, most important, their interrelationships.

John Higham

At the end of the twentieth century, the age-old dilemmas of humanistic education have acquired a new face. What is new is not the dilemmas themselves but their formulation in the oversimplified terms of post-Marxist dissent, by which I mean a dissidence that lacks any vision of the future. If teachers of American history must decide whether to feature national success or group defeat, history is a zero-sum game. To understand the relations between national identity and group identities at greater depth, let us start from a larger contrast that lies at the heart of all the human sciences.

At every educational level, engagement in history, literature, philosophy, and social studies involves two ways of responding to new experience. One way is to analyze the unfamiliar thing by putting our own questions to it and bringing to bear our own concepts and categories. The other way is to appreciate or depreciate the experience by feeling its emotional impact, responding to its beauty and distinctiveness or rejecting and excluding it. The correlative teaching strategies are problem solving and (on the affirmative side) celebration. Each is necessary to our teaching; each is incomplete without the other. Unfortunately, doing justice to both is difficult and perhaps not often attempted. But a working balance between problem solving and celebration is a practical and overarching goal for parents and teachers alike. Doing justice to American history requires it.

Celebration is not necessarily easier to achieve than analysis. As its complexity unfolds at higher grade levels, it may become more difficult. Yet celebration does seem the simpler of the two modes, the more primordial, so it enters the classroom first. That is why children learn so early to salute the flag, to report their family customs, and to draw pictures of their familiar world.

Both modes of education depend heavily on the stance of the teacher. The celebratory mode makes the teacher an advocate of what is under scrutiny. The problem-solving approach turns the teacher into critic or judge. In teaching American history the celebrants and the analysts have usually served different masters.

Official American attitudes toward people with disadvantages of race, religion, gender, or national origin are indisputably much more receptive today than they were a generation or so ago. My distinction between problems and celebrations might therefore seem to suggest that a celebratory approach to what are called minorities has displaced a critical and judgmental

✪ JOHN HIGHAM, Professor of History Emeritus at Johns Hopkins University, is the author of *Civil Rights and Social Wrongs: Black-White Relations Since World War II.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not the whole story. The great change is in how the two approaches are deployed.

Thirty or forty years ago the celebratory dimension in the study of American society and history pertained largely to the dominant American culture. What is now called the "mainstream" was the chief object of celebration in the public schools, as it had been ever since those schools came into being. Among many Americans, by the 1940s the "mainstream" was no longer conceived as exclusive and self-contained. By definition, what was celebrated was a current continually widening through the confluence of many contributory streams.

Of course educators also took note of problems that afflicted minorities. But they were inclined to view the problems as arising from the specific circumstances of a group, not from the general structure of the host society. There was a Negro problem, an Indian problem, an immigration problem, and so on. The progress of democracy could and would reduce these problems, but only as the groups involved entered the mainstream.

Then, in the 1960s and 1970s, the relation between problems and celebrations underwent an extraordinary reversal. The minorities now got the celebrations, the mainstream became the problem. The change began in academic priorities in the universities, filtered down into schools and textbooks, and under the rubric of "multiculturalism" exploded in the late 1980s as an insistent demand for strengthening non-white racial identities by resistance to an integrative core culture.

Along the way a vast corpus of careful, affectionate scholarship was produced to elaborate the histories of America's multitudinous minorities and, from an internal perspective, to preserve the values of their ways of life. This has been celebration fashioned with scrupulous scholarly care. But, on the whole, few problems are explored other than those imposed on the group from outside.

While attention to women and minorities has flourished, the nation as a whole has largely ceased to be the protagonist of American history. Major books that attempt some large grasp on the course of American history in an evaluative way are no longer written. Nation-building has virtually disappeared from the agenda of American historians.

Much of this was due to a general slackening of national loyalties that followed the Vietnam War. Cynicism corroded attachment to national institutions, goals, and projects. Additionally, the waning of a national orientation was encouraged by advancing specialization and by the extraordinary difficulty of weaving together the many narratives of a supposedly heterogeneous people. But America is more than a congeries of separate groups living under the control of a repressive power structure. It is a nation, held together by promises and possibilities glimpsed long ago, struggled for over many generations, and still capable of further development. The nation will have to be celebrated—as well as critiqued—before Americans can recover a sense of a common future together in a dangerously shrinking world.

DAVID A. HOLLINGER

There is no better place to begin a sound answer to the question "What history should our children learn?" as it applies to the national community of the United States at the end of the twentieth century than the second edition of the *National History Standards* issued in the Spring of 1996 by the National Center for History in the Schools and misrepresented in the Fall 1996 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR by John Patrick Diggins. This list of goals for teachers of United States and world history has been liberated from the particular examples of teaching practice that generated the bulk of the criticisms made of the first edition of the *Standards* in 1994.

The differences between the second and the first editions of the *Standards* demand special emphasis in this symposium because readers of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR have been misled by Diggins about these differences. Many of the quotations Diggins uses to damn the Standards for sectarian "bottomism"—the privileging of the accomplishments of people at the bottom of a social hierarchy over elites and creative individuals—are taken from the sample teaching exercises included in the first edition but dropped from the second. Such quotations can be found on pages 502, 504,

✪ DAVID A. HOLLINGER is Professor of History at the University of California at Berkeley. He is the author of *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

505, 509, 513, 514, and 517 of Diggins's article. Since Diggins sometimes quotes statements that he correctly identifies as having appeared in the first edition but not in the second (for instance, on pages 496, 514, 518), readers of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR might well suppose that Diggins is being scrupulously fair. He is not. Readers who have not actually examined the second edition have no reason to suspect that much of Diggins's apparent documentation speaks not at all to the character of the edition ostensibly under discussion.

Two other points made by Diggins demand attention here. First, he represents the Standards as aloof from the facts of power in American history. Second, he complains that the attention given in the Standards to the experiences of groups serves to reinforce ethno-racial, class, and gender identities at the expense of the national community. But what Diggins represents as the reinforcing of group identity is instead a recognition of the very facts of power that Diggins accuses the Standards of ignoring. If women, workers, black people, and other identity groups are mentioned frequently, it is because individual Americans have been systematically treated differently on account of their classification in these categories. A history that fails to come to grips with the role of ascribed social distinctions, and treats individuals only as individuals, misses vital truths that recent scholarship has recovered and addressed in detail. These unhappy truths, reminders of which are appropriately distributed throughout the Standards, do not at all impede "the possibility," as Diggins describes it (519), "of a common curriculum that will enable students to identify with something other than themselves." The development of exactly such a curriculum is fully compatible with, and indeed requires, an honest treatment of the history and consequences of ascribed social distinctions.

But if the second edition of the *National History Standards* is the place to begin a sound answer to the question now posed by THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, it need not be the end of such an answer. Building upon the Standards, teachers would do well, in my opinion, to give special attention to the history of the systems of classification by which individual human beings within and beyond the United States have been assigned to groups. Too often, the current ethno-racial pentagon is taken for granted. Teachers are too often encouraged to deliver the history and culture that they have been led to associate with African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans without emphasizing the contingent character of these basic categories. More time might be spent on the historical process by which different systems of ethno-racial classification, including the five-part demographic structure that now dominates the public life of the United States, have come into being. How many eighth graders, one wonders, understand that the culturally and geographically coded categories now used in our society are based on the color distinctions that are the crudest of traditional ways of distinguishing human beings from one another: black, brown, red, white, and yellow? How many understand the history of the "one-drop rule" for deciding who is "African American"?

One thing that children in the United States should learn about history, I am suggesting, is how various systems of ethno-racial classification have been generated, used, criticized, and discarded through the decades and through the centuries. What interests have the various, specific systems apparently served? To what purposes have these systems been put by various empowered and disempowered agents? Which categories have been introduced when, and by whom? Who, if anyone, resisted the application of this or that category, and in what context? To concentrate on telling such a story would in no way deny the power these categories have exercised over specific people at specific times and places, for good or for ill. Yet, instruction of this kind could demystify and historicize the categories that are easily assumed to be primordial. Indeed, multiculturalism's characteristic emphasis on the integrity of communities of descent has pushed teachers in the direction of an uncritical reinforcing of the old color categories.

Teachers do not have to choose between a fragmented history, according to which each child is encouraged to identify with a color-coded history, and a color-blind nationalist narrative that ignores the empowering as well as the discriminatory functions of ethno-racial distinctions. Truth and national solidarity can both be served by a curriculum that honestly confronts the history of ascribed distinctions.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LINDA K. KERBER

What history the next generation of Americans should learn is a highly important question. Shame on THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR for framing it by a set of questions that convey that what counts as "American history's main track" is stable and obvious, and that sufferings and national ideals are in conflicting categories (separated by "or").

I want the next generation of history students to develop a capacious and humane maturity. I want them to emerge from their studies understanding that human beings are fallible, that politics involves hard and imperfect choices about the uses of power, that history involves *simultaneously* the stories of the powerful and the stories of the weak.

The last twenty-five years have seen an expansion of universities and a virtual explosion of historical research and publication. New knowledge has undermined generalizations with which many teachers—and adults long out of school—had long been comfortable. I want the next generation of history students to benefit from a curriculum that has absorbed the most significant new research, in a spirit of modesty that will prepare them in the future to respond to new evidence and fresh argument.

A few generalizations in need of revision:

—Frederick Jackson Turner's argument that the frontier offered democracy and opportunity to "Americans" can now be seen as problematic. For one thing, women seem to have been more likely to find their opportunities in cities. What then is the "main track"?

—Hundreds of African Americans were lynched each year throughout what is often known as the "Progressive Era," roughly 1890–1920. There was no intervention by the federal government. The nation that countenanced the terrorizing of a large proportion of its native-born citizens was simultaneously a haven for immigrants and a site of much inventive public activity (maximum-hours legislation, the expansion of literacy, innovations in business and industry). What counts as the "main track"?

"As practiced by mature minds," Richard Hofstadter wrote near the end of his all-too-brief life, "history forces us to be aware not only of complexity but of defeat and failure; it tends to deny that high sense of expectation, that hope of ultimate and glorious triumph, that sustains good combatants." The study of history involves not only the recovery of essential facts, although it is that. Nor can it be content with the retelling of heroic and idealistic stories, although it is also that. I want the next generation of history students to understand historical study as involving careful scrutiny and critical inquiry. Historical study involves evaluation and assessment. It involves collecting memories and oral histories—and skeptically checking them against the documentary record. It involves respect for the dead, but it avoids hagiography.

American history was made by immigrant and native-born men and women, of Native American, European, African, and Asian ancestry. Some of the hallowed dead were heroic, some were cowardly, most were frightened human beings doing their best. Their "stories and sufferings" are central, not marginal, to the history of national ideals. To claim space in the curriculum for the experience of people of all classes, of all races, or varying ethnicities is to be true to the state of historical knowledge as it has now developed. A decent respect for all our predecessors is central to both conservative and progressive civic traditions in our democracy.

There is a connection between the respect people can claim in their daily, public life and the extent to which they are understood to have a history that is worth respect. As teachers we know that the names, dates, and "facts" that are explicitly part of the curriculum are only a portion of what is actually taught. Students will forget those dates or remember them with resentment. As teachers we know that what is *conveyed* in our subtext is at least as important as what is stated explicitly. It is *not* necessary for emotional and intellectual health that what students learn about historical experience be always pleasing or flattering; men and women have been victims as well as agents, capable of evil as well as of good. But those who are only *part* of someone *else's* story, as Peter Pan is of Wendy's, can make no

✪ LINDA K. KERBER is May Brodbeck Professor in the Liberal Arts and Professor of History at the University of Iowa. Her book *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship in American History* will be published in the Fall of 1998.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

claims of their own. If Africans are merely a chapter in the history of imperialism, if Jews are a chapter in the history of heresy, if women are part of the history of "universal man," then *living* people who are African American, or Jewish, or women are marginalized into *consumers* of or supplements to other peoples' stories. What is necessary is that we recognize that the past has been constructed by men and women of many backgrounds and identities, individually and in their relations with each other. Lowered self-confidence is a perfectly reasonable conclusion if one has been subtly instructed that what people like oneself have done in the world has not been important and is not worth studying. The promise of democracy is that we always seek more stories to tell and that we will maintain rigorous standards for the accuracy and precision of the historical accounts we write.

JOHN LUKACS

Allow me to confess: I have paid little interest to the debate over the National History Standards. This did not happen because I am now retired from teaching, but because of my conviction that the fixing of National History Standards—no matter how proper and acceptable they may be—are, at best, statements of desiderata and, by their very nature, ephemeral. In the best case their formulation can be only a halting, and inaccurate, expression of a consensus among well-meaning historians of the present time, necessarily larded with compromises. Their formulations may be less ephemeral than the propagandizing and the insistences of those who argue for radical changes in the order and in the topics of American history—which are nothing more than ambitious adjustments to prevailing climates of academic opinions. Yet the very conditions of history, and of historical thinking, are such that the term *standards*—suggesting something fixed and, at least for some time, unalterable—does not really fit them. The problems of the teaching of history—and especially of American history—are greater and deeper than that. They are inseparable from the civilizational—civilizational, and not merely "cultural"—crisis in the midst of which we are now living.

So far as history goes we are in the presence of a dual development. On one level the alarmingly obvious one—there are the problems of quantity and quality. Less and less history is being required, and taught, in our schools. Until about twenty-five years ago this was especially so in our high schools; now it is equally so in our colleges and universities. (In a sense it is even true of our graduate schools, where a shockingly large proportion of candidates for higher degrees are now told to preoccupy themselves with historical theories rather than with the craft of historical reconstruction and its proper description.) The problems of quality inevitably follow—perhaps especially when it comes to the teaching of American history. More than in the history of European nations (at least until recently), in the history of the United States the history of a people has been more, or at least as, important as the history of a state—which (together with the consequently enormous range and mass of its potential materials) made and continues to make the teaching of American history not less but more difficult than that of European nations. A result of this has been a tendency to emphasize what goes under the inadequate name of "social history" but which, lamentably, often amounts to hardly more than a kind of retrospective and shortsighted sociologizing—something that inspires little interest in students.

At the same time there exists an appetite for history in the United States that has had no precedents. Its manifestations are so protean that it is hardly possible even to list them. They include the increase (in numbers as well as in quality) of the work of all kinds of local historical societies. Within the now-dismal state of the publishing industry we can see that popular histories outsell novels by a considerable extent. Concordant with this is the manifest interest of readers in biographies, just when the very methods of biographers have become more and more historical. Add to this the recent tendency of novelists and other writers to fiddle with the new pseudo-genre of the silly name of "faction"—where they, illegitimately, mix history and fiction to-

---

✪ JOHN LUKACS is the author of *The Hitler of History* (Knopf) and the forthcoming *A Thread of Years* (Yale University Press).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gether, attributing nonexistent acts and words and sentiments to historical figures: but now consider how this is the very opposite of the historical novel where history served as the colorful background for a fictitious plot, whereas in these works by Pynchon or Sontag or Vidal or Styron, etc., history is the foreground. It is history that interests them most, even though they may not be aware of what this really means. Indeed, for decades now it seems that the novel (which arose, together with a rise of modern historical consciousness about 250 years ago) may now be absorbed by history, rather than the reverse. Add to this many other things: "documentaries," "docudramas" on film or television; or the fact that, among unrequired electives, history courses in our colleges and universities are still the top selections; or the popular mania (at worst) or respect (at best) for anything that is "old-fashioned" (an adjective that in American English was largely pejorative as late as 70 years ago)—including the amassing of old junk. Yes, historical appetite among Americans is unprecedented and large. Of course it is served, and will continue to be served, by plenty of junk food. Of that professional historians may be aware. Of the existence of the appetite for history they are not.

That is the problem—the isolation of professional intellectuals, a largely self-made isolation that is perhaps more extreme than it was in the past. When the problem is nutrition, the recognition of appetite comes first. Then comes the recognition and the criticism of junk food, which is hardly corrigible by the printing of a national cookbook—or even less by a pamphlet of National Nutritional Standards with which, I am afraid, the present debate, with all of its merits, is concerned.

WALTER A. MCDOUGALL

"If we act only for ourselves," wrote Samuel Johnson, "to neglect the study of history is not prudent. If we are entrusted with the care of others it is not just." Prudence and justice are two words conspicuous by their absence in our otherwise verbose debates on how, why, and when to teach which sort of history to American children. The National Standards for History, for instance, have been criticized from many perspectives, but to my knowledge I am the only reviewer to question the strength of those standards as well as their weaknesses. I found them altogether too inclusive, demanding, and sophisticated for high school teachers and students. For instance, I considered the Standards' repeated invitations to debunk the sainted image of Woodrow Wilson entirely legitimate, but asked whether "it is *wise* to teach grade-schoolers that Wilson was foolish or hypocritical to proclaim democracy, disarmament, self-determination, free trade, and a League of Nations to a war-ravaged world?" A college seminar should take a critical stance toward the icons of American history. But is it prudent to turn eleventh graders into cynics with regard to the values their nation holds dear?

The sterility of the current debate over history may be explained by the failure of combatants of all political stripes to acknowledge and grapple with the fact that the teaching of history serves three functions at once. One, obviously, is intellectual. History is the grandest vehicle for vicarious experience: it truly educates ("leads outward" in the Latin) provincial young minds and obliges them to reason, wonder, and brood about the vastness, richness, and tragedy of the human condition. If taught well, it trains young minds in the rules of evidence and logic, teaches them how to approximate truth through the patient exposure of falsehood, and gives them the mental trellis they need to place themselves in time and space and organize every other sort of knowledge they acquire in the humanities and sciences. To deny students history, therefore, is to alienate them from their community, nation, culture, and species.

The second pedagogical function of history is quite different, and often seems to conflict with the first. That is its civic function. From the ancient Israelites and Greeks to the medieval church to the modern nation-state, those charged with educating the next generation of leaders or citizens have used history to impart a reverence for the values and institutions of the creed or state. The post-modern critic

✪ WALTER A. MCDOUGALL teaches at the University of Pennsylvania and is co-director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute's History Academy. He reviewed the original and revised National History Standards for *Commentary*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

may immediately charge that to do so amounts to a misuse of history and the brainwashing of young people: just think of the sectarian history taught in religious schools, the indoctrination imposed by totalitarian regimes, or the flag-waving history that hoodwinked young Americans into volunteering for the Vietnam War. But to cite such examples is to beg the question. The civic purpose of history cannot be abolished, since all history—traditional or subversive of tradition—has a civic effect. So the real questions are whether American schools ought to tilt toward extolling or denouncing our nation's values and institutions, and how the civic function may be fulfilled without violence to the intellectual function of history.

Those questions are painfully hard to resolve and are a matter of conscience as much as of reason—which brings us to the third, moral, function of history. If honestly taught, history is the only academic subject that inspires humility. Theology used to do that, but in our present era—and in public schools especially—history must do the work of theology. It is, for all practical purposes, the religion in the modern curriculum. Students whose history teachers discharge their intellectual and civic responsibilities will acquire a sense of the contingency of all human endeavor, the gaping disparity between motives and consequences in all human action, and how little control human beings have over their own lives and those of others. A course in history ought to teach wisdom—and if it doesn't, then it is not history but something else.

I believe it is possible to pursue all three purposes of history in books and the classroom. None of us will do so without friction and shortfalls, because we are no less creaturely than the historical people we teach about. Moreover, the quality of our instruction is limited and skewed by the finite set of facts we know or set before our pupils. But errors of fact and judgment as to what to include or omit are excusable and correctable. What is inexcusable and, as Samuel Johnson wrote, unjust is the willful denial of truth or promotion of falsehood in order to "slam-dunk" into students an intellectual, civic, or moral purpose at the expense of the other two. Johnson may have been thinking about statesmen when he referred to those "entrusted with the care of others." But no one is more entrusted with others' care than teachers, and no teachers more than historians.

There is no magic formula for the concoction of curricula that mix the three functions of history. But we could do worse than to follow the prescription of the eminent world historian William H. McNeill:

> One cannot know everything, hence one must make choices. And just as some facts are more important to know than others, so have certain cultures displayed skills superior to those of others in every time and place in history. Imagine living in proximity to a competitor possessed of skills greater than yours. There is no use asserting that your culture is just as good as his. It palpably isn't, and you must do something about it. . . . Superiority and inferiority, real and perceived, are the substance of human intercourse and the major stimulus to social change throughout history. . . . And the principle of selection is simply this: what do we need to know in order to understand how the world became what we perceive it to be today?
>
> Thus, we must focus the attention of our students on the principal seats of innovation throughout history, while remaining aware of the costly adaptations and adjustments and in many cases the suffering of those conquered or displaced by dint of their proximity to those seats of innovation. The main story line, therefore, is the accumulation of human skills, organization, and knowledge across the millennia, which permitted human beings to exercise power and acquire wealth through concerted action among larger and larger groups of people across greater and greater distances until we reach our present era of global interaction.

McNeill's principle is no less applicable to U.S. history. An honest history must hear and pass on the laments of those displaced (including many white males) in the course of our nation's growth. But the main story line must remain that of the Euro-American dominant culture, its ideals and aspirations, creativity and service to itself and others in peacetime and war: the good as well as the bad and ugly. For only by learning that story will tomorrow's leaders—of whatever race or sex—know the standards they are supposed to live up to, gain the knowledge needed to excel, and begin to acquire good judgment, without which the power that knowledge imparts is a curse.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDMUND MORGAN

The questions posed here are so loaded that they seem designed to answer themselves. But the answers they suggest look more like slogans than any reasoned approach to history. Is anyone against national ideals linked with heroism? Does anyone want a history program that is "far off American history's main track"? What are the groups whose "stories and sufferings" meet that description? Do you mean blacks, who have probably had more sufferings than any other group? Or American Indians? Or women? None of these has a story far off American history's main track.

You pose alternatives and make one alternative look more attractive than the other, but I cannot see what is incompatible between them apart from the way you phrase them. It would certainly make no sense to feature history that is far off the main track, but I don't suppose you mean by that featuring the history of groups like, say, the Moravians or the Millerites.

There is no doubt in my mind that history courses should feature the main track. I don't know what the heroism of the nation is supposed to mean, but I believe that the history taught in American schools should feature the American nation, including its ideals as well as its failings. Students should learn how the society in which they live arrived at its present configuration. They will be participants in whatever it becomes, and they cannot participate intelligently without knowing what it has been, what choices their predecessors had to make, who made them, who did not make them, how they were made, whom they affected, who benefited from them, and who suffered from them.

I suppose this means that history courses should feature the political history of the United States, with a focus on public policy. In recent years American historians have given more attention to social history and social relations, perhaps because old-fashioned political history tended to neglect them. But the new social history will have its most significant effect in broadening the scope of political history. History, as written and recorded, has always been mainly about the exercise of power. When it strays far from that theme, it can become antiquarian, not a bad thing in itself but not crucial to the understanding of what it means to live or to have lived under the government of one country rather than another. The story of any group that has suffered under the government of this country is part of the story of the public policy that produced the suffering. In short, I think you have posed a false alternative and I don't need a thousand words to say it.

DIANE RAVITCH

The question must be placed in perspective. Ten years ago, a movement began to revive history education in the schools. This movement was launched by the California history curriculum of 1987 and the report of the Bradley Commission on History in the Schools in 1988. Both initiatives sought, for the first time in decades, to counter the baneful effects of the social studies field, which has quietly driven history out of the lower grades and attempted to replace it in the high schools with courses about contemporary issues, absent any historical grounding.

Unfortunately, the history movement was derailed by the emergence of ethnic activism in the early 1990s, which distorted every discussion of history education by denouncing claims of objectivity as "Eurocentrism" and by demanding the introduction of purposeful subjectivity, relativism, and group narcissism into the curriculum (for instance, "only members of my group can understand the historical experiences of members of my group"). Then in 1994, the publication of proposed national history standards ignited a furious rhetorical battle over the content of history instruction and how to parcel out attention between white males and everyone else. In the wake of these events, many educators appar-

---

✪ EDMUND MORGAN is Sterling Professor of History Emeritus at Yale University, and the author of many books, including *The Birth of the Republic* and *American Slavery—American Freedom.*

✪ DIANE RAVITCH is Senior Research Scholar at New York University and Non-resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. Her latest book is *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ently became convinced that it was better to stick with contentless "social studies" than to risk a struggle over whose history should be taught.

So, while we must be concerned about what history our children will learn (and will no doubt continue to debate the matter at length), we should be even more concerned about whether history is taught at all. Most states and local school districts teach no history at all in the early grades. Once, young children learned myths, legends, and folktales, and the lives of important men and women; now, young children learn about the sociology of the family and study the economics and government of the local community. Why any sane adult would expect little children to be interested in "the economics of scarcity" or "how local services are funded," instead of reading about or playacting the lives of brave pioneers, explorers, and scientists, is beyond understanding. Yet in almost every second- or third-grade class in this country, one encounters little children weighted down with superficial and banal studies of family and community, deprived of the joy of story.

In some states, history teaching in the high school is not much better, since the social studies field controls and barely tolerates the study of history. For the past decade, the National Council for the Social Studies has been led by people who don't bother to conceal their disdain for history, which they consider a boring and unimportant study ("Who cares what happened long ago?"). Given the absorption of history by the social studies field, it is not surprising to find that it is frequently missing from state social studies "standards."

In 1995, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that 57 percent of high school seniors scored "below basic" in their knowledge of American history. It is not possible to score any lower than that. These are students who have just finished the last course in American history that most of them will ever take. These are students who are now voters.

If further confirmation were needed of the wretched state of history in the schools today, it can be found in a report released by the U.S. Department of Education in mid-1997 on "America's Teachers." According to this survey, 59% of the nation's social studies teachers have neither a major nor a minor in the subject that they teach. This means that a majority of those who teach social studies have studied few if any courses in history, political science, economics, sociology, or any other social science.

In addition, 82 percent of social studies teachers in high school and middle schools have neither a major nor a minor in history. This means that history is often taught by those who never studied it. This is a scandal. Worse, it is a preventable scandal, since state departments of education have the authority to set the requirements for a teaching certificate.

The issue of this forum then must be rephrased as What kind of history should be taught where there is a readiness to teach history? One purpose of teaching American history is, I believe, to teach the ideas and ideals that make us a nation. One of our leading educators, William Chandler Bagley (1874–1946), wrote in 1910: "The true function of national history in our [common] schools is to establish in the pupils' minds those ideals and standards of action which differentiate the American people from the rest of the world, and especially to fortify these ideals and standards by a description of the events and conditions through which they developed." Part of the burden of national history, Bagley noted, was to inspire children by setting before them lives that exemplify what our nation believes in and hopes to become.

This conception of history in the schools is out of fashion today, even where history is taught. Taking a cue from higher education, many teachers strive to emphasize the record of oppression and injustice in the nation's past. Teaching of national ideals is considered altogether too patriotic, if not downright dishonest. But down this path lies much trouble, for how will we develop a sense of an American people, an American community, unless we learn about the ideals, events, and individuals that were important in the shaping of our nation and that gave us our current standards of judgment? Certainly, students must learn about the injustices that have occurred in American history, but they must also learn how injustices were corrected. It would be a distortion and a terrible shame for all of us if they were taught that the dark side is the only side.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

C. VANN WOODWARD

There is probably little more likelihood of the teachers of American history reaching a consensus on what should be required and taught than there is among the scholars and writers of history agreeing upon what should be written and published. Among both, the doing of history usually involves endless discussion, debate, and controversy. They raise such basic questions as what happened and why, who was responsible and to what degree, what should have been done and how, what should be included and what omitted. The emerging answers do not provide eternal truth, but they often challenge received wisdom and help prevent confusion of history with nostalgia or something flawless and unchanging called "heritage." History is kept alive by change, by challenge, and by reinterpretation.

Few would deny that American history courses for public schools should include the Revolution, the Constitution, and the Civil War. Yet in 1997 Thomas Jefferson was the subject of more controversy among historians than any other figure of his importance; the Constitution has rarely been more changed by reinterpretation in federal courts; and Lincoln and Civil War history have undergone more than the usual flood of revisionary books. This is not to suggest that children should be kept abreast of ongoing revision by scholars.

Indeed that cannot reasonably be expected of more than a few of their teachers in limited fields. But it is important that the teachers and supervisors of public education who decide upon the curriculum and the textbooks should be aware of the continuing revision of history.

Not until the 1890s did American history begin to gain a place in the curriculum of public schools and private academies, and even that proved to be temporary. From the outset a succession of independent advisory committees influenced curriculum decisions and subsequent changes. The first three committees, reporting between 1892 and 1911, recommended a history-centered curriculum that was favorably received and widely required by school administrators. For two decades the prevailing secondary school requirement was four years of history—more than ever before or since.

Reaction set in about 1920 and continued to influence secondary school curricula strongly for more than half a century. Leaders of the reaction called themselves "Progressives" and demanded the replacement of history by social studies with "practical" and "relevant" courses to promote "social control" and prepare children for adjustment to the status quo. The decline of history in schools reflected what was happening in colleges, where teachers are educated. The new social history stressed quantification and narrowly defined and fragmented topics. By 1990 students could graduate from some 78 percent of American colleges without taking a course in the history of Western civilization. High school students could satisfy their social studies requirements by taking courses in current events, drug education, and sex education, and no history course whatever.

Historians and teachers, especially those in American history, were increasingly distressed by these developments. With commissions sponsored by the Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, and other organizations, they sought to regain for history the place it once had in American schools. Encouraged by the demand for reform of national education in general by both President George Bush and President Bill Clinton, champions of a history revival in the schools established a National History Standards Project with federal support. The project involved the work of hundreds of people and years of study that resulted in a three-volume report on standards and methods of teaching national and world history published in 1994.

The part of the report devoted to American history came under immediate and furious attack for giving short shrift to important figures and crucial events and too much time to sufferings of the unfortunate. In response a revised version in one volume entitled *National Standards for History* was published in 1996. The revision omitted the most criticized features of the old version and satisfied some but not all the critics. Conceding that curriculum decisions "should remain under local or state control," the report suggested for grades five to twelve a periodization of United States

✪ C. VANN WOODWARD is Sterling Professor of History Emeritus at Yale University and the author of, most recently, *The Old World's New World.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

history in ten chronologically arranged "eras" with "breakpoints" such as "the American Revolution, the Constitution, the Civil War, Progressivism, the New Deal, and the Cold War," but including social, economic, and cultural history. The report insisted that "the schools devote no less than three years of instruction to United States history" plus the same to world history during the student's middle and high school years. In 1996 only seventeen states provided as much as three years of U.S. history, and that under a variety of curriculum plans. It remains to be seen how history will fare in schools in the future.

Changes in how history fares in colleges and universities will affect how it fares in the schools (and vice versa), as they have in the past. University history departments suffered their full share of damage from intramural assaults on the humanities and the academic convulsions that resulted from multiculturalism. Those were the years of bashing the Western canon and Dead White Males, a time of group thinking and minority withdrawal (not always voluntary to be sure) into segregated dormitories, dining halls, fraternities, sororities, student unions, and "ethnic theme houses." Curriculums were revised with political purposes, to promote good causes, with courses in some places taught in separate departments by professors of appropriate gender, race, or sexual orientation.

Among American historians could be found both proponents and opponents of this revolution, but whether their reactions had anything to do with it or not, their subject fell into steep decline in terms of student patronage after the academic year 1970–71. That year marked an all-time high in the number of bachelor degrees awarded in history, and this on top of eighteen years of unprecedented advances—the great history boom. The crash began the following year and continued for fifteen years, the number of bachelor degrees plunging from 44,663 in 1971 to 16,413 in 1986, and that while total college enrollments were soaring. History's decline in percentage of degrees awarded was thus far more dramatic: from 5.3 percent to 1.7 percent in the same period.

Some signs of recovery have appeared in the last ten years, especially in universities of high rank in eastern states, in the production of historical works of distinction, and in the recovery of status and influence in the intellectual community that had been lost to the anti-history bias of French intellectuals of the previous generation. But few signs of the old history boom mentality appeared in the academy. The job market for newly minted historians was still discouraging. Professional journals and history courses in the academy continue to give voice occasionally to the use of the guild for political, philanthropic, or therapeutic purposes. Full recovery still seems remote.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gertrude Stein: Woman Is a Woman Is

BRENDA WINEAPPLE

Gertrude Stein is one of those renowned American authors about whom, it's commonly supposed, everything is known—and not just because she's a veritable household name in households that have never read her. A woman who fixed her eye firmly on posterity, she even saved envelope flaps she'd doodled on and, in the 1930s, began to dump a lifetime's accumulated paper into cartons to send to America, where it was sorted and deposited, through Thornton Wilder's ministration, at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscripts Library.

With so much available on Stein, published and unpublished, by her and about her, I hardly expected to find anything new—no biographical equivalent of the smoking gun—when I began research for a book on Gertrude and her brother Leo. A new perspective, yes, with an interpretation that differs from those of previous biographers: that was my aim, though every biographer secretly dreams of the lost ark. Nor did I expect to come upon anything concrete to help resolve what for me were key, and nagging, questions about Stein's opinion of women, herself first and foremost, or of women in general. Was she the feminist many of her supporters presume she was? And if she was, early or late, then why did she assign to Alice Toklas the entertainment of the wives while she gabbed with the other so-called geniuses?

Letting these questions take me where they would, I landed quite often elbow-deep in the private affairs of several other lives. And then, just when I worried most that I had crawled out on a tangent, I came upon an amazing essay written by Gertrude Stein in her youth, before she performed her feats of literature, and long before she saved her papers.

"Gertrude Gertrude remember the cause of women," one of her friends in medical school reportedly pleaded when Stein forswore the coveted Johns Hopkins degree. The cause of women was all right, said Stein in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, it just happened not to be her cause.

When I began my research six years ago, I knew that one of Gertrude's earliest and most unmemorable writings about women is an odd tale she folded into her nine-hundred-page magnum opus, *The Making of Americans*. Originally called "Fernhurst: The History of Philip Redfern, A Student of the Nature of Women," the story is based on the tumultuous erotic career of Alfred LeRoy Hodder. The dashing Hodder, aka the Byron of Bryn Mawr College, had been an instructor of literature there when he fell in love with another celebrated teacher, Mamie Gwinn. Gwinn just happened to be the companion of the college president, Martha Carey Thomas.

To Stein aficionados, the importance of this little roman à clef lay mainly in its reflection of Stein's lesbian imbroglio with, coincidentally, two Bryn Mawr graduates. Beyond that, there was nothing much to say. Dwarfed by the huge, Talmudic novel into which it made a forgettable contribution, "Fernhurst" was apprentice work, tucked away in a corner of the Beinecke, nothing more.

But when I first read the holograph version of the story, copied neatly in Stein's hand onto the pages of a tidy red notebook, I discovered a startling polemic about women and

✪ BRENDA WINEAPPLE is Washington Irving Professor of Modern Literary and Historical Studies at Union College.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

women's education. A young, preachy Stein here argues that women who cling to the "intellectual furniture obtained at their college" naively assume that their "power was as a man's." "I am for having women learn what they can," Stein was willing to concede in the early pages of "Fernhurst," "but not . . . to believe that a man's work is suited to them because they have mastered a boy's education. In short . . . the great mass of the world's women should content themselves with attaining to womanhood."

Such a blunt view about a woman's ultimate place—the home—is the most puzzling element of "Fernhurst," itself a strange amalgam of romance, diatribe, and truncated feminism. Why, for instance, did Stein spend almost one-third of this otherwise old-fashioned love story arguing against Carey Thomas and Mamie Gwinn's New Woman, the liberated creature now admitted to the colleges, professions, and equal partnerships previously closed to her? Wasn't Stein herself a New Woman? Hadn't she been an exemplary student at Radcliffe who published two articles in the *Psychological Review* before graduating and who then spent four years at Johns Hopkins Medical School readying herself for a profession in which women were absolute anomalies? Yet in "Fernhurst" she argued against all this. What's more, she used the mysterious Alfred Hodder as her protagonist, casting him as a "student of the nature of women," which is how she had characterized herself: a fledgling psychiatrist specializing in female complaints.

To date, nothing had been written about Hodder except by Gertrude's biographers, who typically suggest she had been acquainted with him at college, perhaps through her brother Leo. The files of the Harvard University archives, however, show that Hodder had left Cambridge by the time Gertrude arrived and Leo had hardly known him there. I decided to try my luck at Princeton University, where Mamie Gwinn's and Alfred Hodder's papers are kept, to determine, if I could, why he fascinated Stein, and why Gwinn and Thomas annoyed her. Warned I'd be wasting my time—there were no Steins among the Hodders—I nonetheless boarded a sweaty gray commuter train bound for southern New Jersey in the stubborn heat of June 1993.

I walked the short distance from the train station to Princeton's Firestone Library, where I plunged into dusty boxes filled with tiny sheets written in Alfred Hodder's microscopic scrawl, hundreds of letters sent to Mamie Gwinn. His was a roué's past, to be sure. Born in Ohio in 1866, Hodder as a very young man had married a dying woman in what was, he later insisted, a "*mariage blanc*"; he claimed sexual relations would have killed her. (She died soon after, notwithstanding.) Consoling himself in the arms of a modern young pianist who practiced free love, by 1889 Hodder was a member of the Colorado bar and in New York en route to Harvard University, where he'd been accepted as a doctoral student. His lover, Jessie Donaldson, sailed to Germany to study music.

A year later, Hodder abruptly quit Harvard, resigning a coveted fellowship in order to work in Germany under the noted psychologist Wilhelm Wundt. Or so he said. In actuality, Jessie had written that she was pregnant, and, gentleman that he was, Hodder had rushed to her side. According to Donaldson, he married her; according to Hodder, chivalry had its limits: the pregnancy was a hoax, and common-law was all he would muster—which, in a relatively short time, produced a child anyway. And though Gertrude Stein liked to boast that she was William James's pet, only Alfred Hodder could say his daughter was born, quite literally, under a Jamesian roof.

It was a perpetually generous William James himself who helped Hodder land the position at Bryn Mawr, to which he went alone. When Jessie arrived eight weeks later, he consented to bring her around, albeit resentfully, since he was already smitten with Mamie Gwinn. To Gwinn, he poured out his heart in bursts of familiarity evidently unusual for Mamie, generally considered a remote and spectral figure dwelling among untrodden ways, and mostly with Carey Thomas. For in their youth, these two brazen women had gone off to Europe unchaperoned, settling in Zurich while Thomas earned her Ph.D. Back in the United States, Thomas was soon appointed Bryn Mawr's first dean, and Mamie Gwinn, who shared Thomas's commitment to women's emancipation, professional opportunity, and educational attainment, was inducted as one of its first graduate students, earning her own doctorate in 1888. As a teacher, reciting Ruskin, Pater, and Swinburne, she seemed Bryn Mawr incarnate: the sovereign female

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scholar delivered from the affairs of vulgar men. Until, that is, she met Alfred Hodder.

It would have now been easy to accept the standard interpretation, that Gertrude Stein, after learning this much about Gwinn, Thomas, and Hodder, used the story to speak of her own early love affair, another sorry triangle that involved one of Gwinn's disciples. Still, I also regarded "Fernhurst" as Stein's answer to the Bryn Mawr creed and the women representing it, with Hodder acting as the foil who brought their lofty goals to wrack. Yet appealing as it was, this theory did not mine the raw passion with which Stein condemned women's education, or at least its outcome and its aim.

Day after day, I returned to the retro-Gothic pastoral of Princeton University, sat at the long refectory-like table under a green-shaded reading lamp, and removed my bracelet (a private ritual), resting my arms before me as I prepared for another day of note taking. I read on. In 1898, Hodder left Bryn Mawr—under a predictable cloud—to settle in Greenwich Village, renting rooms in a building ironically named the Benedick (Bachelor), near Washington Square. His passion for Mamie Gwinn now fully and physically requited, he intended to write a novel, which he did, about the changing relations of the sexes. He would call it *The New Americans*; it was a book that I knew Gertrude had liked.

Weary, I looked up from the table, wondering if I had strayed too far from the Steins, seduced as I was by this tangled affair. I could resolve nothing through Carey Thomas, Mamie Gwinn, or even Bernard and Mary Berenson, who were related to Carey Thomas on Mary's side. I knew there was a real Fernhurst, which was the English residence of Mary Berenson's parents, and I knew that during desultory afternoons there, Hodder was a juicy topic. Leo Stein visited Fernhurst and, later, so did Gertrude. But none of this definitively explained her reaction to the Hodder affair, never mind the New Woman or Mamie Gwinn. Yet for some reason I couldn't stop looking through those dusty boxes.

Ultimately, it was Leo Stein who provided the vital connection between his sister and Hodder, and with that established, discoveries tumbled forth. In 1899, Leo often fled Baltimore, where he was then living with Gertrude, and hung about the offices of Lincoln Steffens's newspaper, *The Commercial Advertiser*, to which Alfred Hodder contributed an occasional article. I read Hodder's journalism and then, returning to my boxes (I was by now quite proprietary), discovered that Hodder frequently whiled away his evenings in the local tap rooms on the city's back streets. He was joined by Leo's cousin Fred Stein and a man named Howard Gans—the only man in whom Hodder had entrusted his secrets. And Gans and Fred Stein were Leo's best friends.

Leo quit America in 1900 for Europe. His sister, however, remained behind, shuttling more and more often between Baltimore and Manhattan, often staying with cousin Fred and Fred's sister (who later married Gans). She must have joined their merry band of friends, or so I hoped, more eager than ever for connections. For I had now arrived at a crucial but shadowy period in Gertrude's own career. She had just arranged a postgraduate internship for herself—itself an unknown fact I'd uncovered elsewhere—but in the spring of 1901, she bizarrely flunked obstetrics and could not take her degree. The event baffled those closest to her, so confident were they of her success. Imagine their surprise when she subsequently refused whatever second chance Hopkins offered and then blithely walked away, never to look back.

The reasons have remained a mystery. No original documents announce Stein's state of mind, no letters or even any second- or third-hand testimony explain Gertrude Stein's flight from medicine or the succeeding interval when she dangled between a botched medical career and a zealous literary one. All we have, really, is Stein's dismissal of the whole episode in *The Autobiography*, accompanied by her friend's dispirited entreaty, "remember the cause of women."

I took one last look at Alfred Hodder's letters and datebooks and read with a start that Gertrude Stein had indeed remembered the cause of women. This is what she told her new confidante, Hodder himself, who was so interested in what "Miss Stein" had to say that, much to my endless delight, he left a record of the conversation.

November 22, 1901. "Miss Stein" was at a "jolly" dinner last night at the Cafe Liberty. Miss Stein "discoursed" on Hodder's novel *The New Americans.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Princeton, the month was now July. It was late in the day and the temperature soared. Inside, the room seemed airless.

Stein and Hodder were each impressed enough with the other to note their meeting, Stein in "Fernhurst" and Hodder in his daily dispatch. I read on with excited, mordant fascination, sometimes catching the phrase or slang of a lost world that had, for a moment, cracked open, transporting me back ninety years. Young men and women crowded about dining tables, and, over the clank of silverware, Alfred Hodder politely told Gertrude Stein he appreciated her candor about *The New Americans,* in which she thought the women inadequately portrayed. Gertrude Stein was talking, responding, eating dinner in a downtown restaurant, suddenly alive.

At the Benedick, Alfred Hodder sat down to write his nightly missive to Mamie Gwinn. Miss Stein was skeptical about the New Woman, he explained to Mamie, although she said that, while at Radcliffe, she and her friends believed in the equality of the sexes as if it had been a religion. Medical school had taught her otherwise: a woman could not succeed without the help, the paternalism in fact, of men.

I paused to imagine Gwinn's boiling reply. Later, I was to find it, but at the time I pressed on, interested only in what Hodder recounted of Stein's conversation. I paged through more of his letters.

January 5, 1902. Another dinner, another conversation. Even if women were more intelligent, Miss Stein had insisted, men were more capable. They got things done; women just got discouraged.

February 1902. Gertrude Stein gave Alfred Hodder a typewritten essay. He was sending it to Mamie Gwinn. Why would he do that, I asked myself, and then the full realization broke: Gertrude Stein had given Alfred Hodder an essay. That meant she had written an essay, typed an essay, put it in a large envelope perhaps, carried it to New York on the train. It was an essay she typed, an essay on women, an essay no Stein enthusiast, past or present, had ever seen, catalogued, read, or heard of. Could this be true? Where was the envelope? Where was the essay?

I considered. Mamie Gwinn would never have saved it. For who was Gertrude Stein to her? An annoying upstart, a throwback. But naturally I had to look, and when no such essay appeared among Mamie Gwinn's papers, even disguised as something else, I was not particularly surprised. Nonetheless, I filled out another library slip—this last time to fetch a box of miscellany. It arrived, and I rifled through the nondescript folders within, one by one.

Gertrude Stein had given Alfred Hodder an essay. Hodder had given it to Mamie Gwinn. Mamie Gwinn more or less gave it to me.

I pulled out of one of the unmarked folders eight typed legal sheets unsigned and, at first glance, innocuous. They bore the beguiling title, "Degeneration in American Women." I leafed through. Penned at the top of each sheet was a page number. There were also corrections, several on a page, written in a clean, legible script. All these were sharply familiar. I had seen Stein's cursive on hundreds of manuscripts, letters, and cards.

I tried to regain my bearings. Corrections in Stein's hand, while telling, did not in themselves prove this paper her brainchild. Nonchalantly, I asked the young woman at the front desk if I could have the pages photocopied. I felt flushed and unexplainably furtive. When the copy was made, I rushed out of the library, leaving my bracelet on the table.

"Degeneration in American Women" was likely written for publication, perhaps in the *Journal of the American Medical Association,* for it begins as a reply to the quasi-medical study by George J. Engelmann, "The Increasing Sterility of American Women," which was published in that same journal on October 5, 1901. Dr. Engelmann, it seems, had deplored the falling birthrate among white, educated, middle-class American women; so did the author of "Degeneration," who sent the New Woman packing: "It will only be when women succeed in relearning the fact that the only serious business of life in which they cannot be entirely outclassed by the male is that of child bearing that they will once more look with respect upon their normal and legitimate function." Here was the sentiment, almost verbatim, of "Fernhurst." With a twist. Biology was destiny all right, and women were the losers in the battle of the sexes—except in the matter of childbirth.

Like "Fernhurst," the targets of "Degeneration" were the Carey Thomases and Mamie Gwinns of the women's movement. "Degen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eration" condemned their overeducated tendency to mistake women's "cleverness and intelligence for effective capacity for the work of the world"—an ivory tower dictum that shattered on contact with "the real business of life" where "the male code is the only possible one." Stein had told Hodder she didn't much like it, though nothing could be done. Such was nature.

But was "Degeneration" actually written by Gertrude Stein? In the furious weeks that followed, I ran to libraries, inspected sources, returned to Yale. Dates coincided; references coincided. I checked the typeface of "Degeneration" against that of the 1899 Stein paper "The Value of College Education for Women" (also unsigned), which Dr. Claribel Cone, its recipient, had the courtesy to identify and date for posterity. Mamie Gwinn had not been so kind and yet, judging from the typeface alone—which matched—it looked as if she who loathed Stein's essay had, for reasons of her own, preserved it.

Evidence was mounting. And not just external evidence: there was, for instance, the matter of style, which suggested I found the very first, perhaps unintentional, example of Stein's signature preoccupation with rhythm, as well as her habit of omitting punctuation, particularly commas; her customary, if restless, string of independent clauses, her passion for participles and the repetitive structures she looped with a biblical *and*. Even the tendency to run phrases together seemed to anticipate her later, more deliberate linguistic adventures. The leitmotif of *The Making of Americans* literally appeared, word for word, in "Degeneration": the notion of "right living" with its celebration of the "normal functions of living, walking, talking, thinking, being, eating and drinking."

At Princeton again, I hunted for Mamie Gwinn's reaction, if any, to the essay Hodder had sent her. As I suspected, Gwinn had been appalled but, fortunately, not struck dumb. Her angry reply was yet more confirmation, for it countermanded the arguments of Stein's essay virtually word for word. "Degeneration" was indeed the paper Mamie Gwinn despised. By now the identity of its author was incontrovertible—it was Gertrude Stein.

A disillusioned, reactionary, and defiant Gertrude Stein had appeared before me one scorching New Jersey afternoon, stilted, full of bluff, and holier-than-thou. This Stein was canny, too, for the title of her essay, "Degeneration of American Women," summoned both the pseudo-scientific jargon of eugenics, a late-nineteenth-century passion I knew she rather enjoyed, and that of the sexologists, for whom biological degeneracy spelled homoeroticism. Was this also Stein's meaning?

It's impossible to know for sure. Yet "Degeneration" was written when she faced a series of crucial transformations, having given up one career for another in light of her recent failure at medical school and, what's more, having redefined her own sexuality in light of a recent and, despite its anguish, liberating lesbian love affair. The declamations of "Degeneration," then, make ironic sense, coming from one who had just abandoned medicine by failing obstetrics. By defining femininity in conventional terms and instructing women to return home, Stein restored their power, or thought she did, granting women a separate, uncontested sphere. But since she also equated the feminine with enslavement, she chose otherwise for herself; she elected the writer's life, not motherhood and, as a woman who loved other women, exempted herself from the rule of maternity she casually prescribed for others. "Of course it is not meant that there are not a few women in every generation who are exceptions to this rule," she declared, "but these exceptions are too rare to make it necessary to subvert the order of things in their behalf and besides if their need for some other method of expression is a real need there is very little doubt but that the opportunity of expression will be open to them." She was the exceptional woman whose need for expression was raw and real.

In this, "Degeneration" also augurs the announcement that later would offend many: Stein's almost flat assertion of her genius. It also, however, exposes her stake in it. Perhaps Stein had to do more than repudiate the future she urged on other women and go far beyond them. Perhaps that too is one wellspring of her remarkable drive. And perhaps, even, she had to reject America as well, soon to leave it far behind, the expatriate supreme.

Gertrude Stein was iconoclastic, intelligent, and querulous. Her prose cleansed both the language and our habits of reading it. But willing to comment on and contradict herself with an insouciance positively Whitmanesque, in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

our day she has herself become something of a cipher, seized by those who found in her prose, and then in her person, the shibboleth of a cause. But she was neither the Mother Goose of Montparnasse nor the Mother of Us All.

Was she a feminist? "Degeneration" renders the question obsolete. Its author was brash, untried, and rife with the conflicts a more poised Stein would later conceal or convert into literary muscle: she who would never be a mother advised motherhood; she who would be virtually canonized as one of the most creative and liberated women of the century counseled the mundane and conservative—but not for herself. And this lesbian Jew who loved democracy, inspiring women and men to discover themselves, also spoke a nativist language, urging white middle-class American women to submit to a round of putative or biological givens.

The paradoxes of "Degeneration" are the paradoxes of Gertrude Stein, neither radical nor philistine, feminist nor foul; in "Degeneration" she is a twenty-eight-year-old woman grappling with her life and on its threshold. She is alive, complex, jam-packed with contradiction—and the biographer's true find.

Caesarean

(For TJE, born on Memorial Day)

DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

Startled from ancient sleep in a dark house
By crashing walls, harsh torches, strangers
Dragging him naked through his mother's blood,
No hero would stand up to the invaders
With such intrinsic dignity as you showed
This morning, the first day of your life.
At the shock of air you cried out loud
In sight of a new world and a world lost.
Then you were quiet, curious, engrossed,
Blue eyes half-open bearing a ripple of light
From that primordial ocean cast asunder.
May your vision never weary of the sight
Of this strange country and our stranger ways;
And may the days be worthy of your wonder.

✪ DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN's most recent book of poetry is *The Boy in the Well.* His books of prose include *Star of Wonder* and *Sister Aimee.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My Stardust Memories

WILLIAM ZINSSER

Every time a new Woody Allen movie comes along I can't help thinking back to one of his earlier films, *Stardust Memories.* That's the one that gave me my movie career.

The year was 1980, and I was sitting at my typewriter in New York, plying my writer's trade. When the phone rang I had no great expectations; freelance writers answering the phone tend to be braced for negative news.

"Bill, honey?" said a young woman's voice. "This is Sandra from Woody Allen's office. Woody wondered if you'd like to be in his new movie."

That was something new in phone calls. I had never done any acting or dreamed any theatrical dreams. But who didn't want to be in a Woody Allen movie? I knew that he often cast ordinary people in small roles. What small plum did he have for me? I hesitated for a decently modest moment and then told Sandra I'd like to do it.

"Good," she said. "Woody will be very pleased." She said that someone else would be calling me with further details.

A half hour later the phone rang again. "Bill, honey," a voice said, "this is Stephanie from Woody Allen's office." How wonderful, I thought, to be in a line of work where I was called "Bill, honey." Stephanie said she was calling to get my measurements. Measurements! I caught a whiff of greasepaint over the telephone line. She needed my jacket size, my waist size, my trouser length, my inseam and my collar size, and I gave them to her gladly. I would have told her anything. I wanted to ask what role I was being measured for, but she was gone. I called my wife to tell her I was in show business.

The next day the phone rang again. "Bill, honey," another voice said, "this is Jill from Woody's office." Jill explained that my scene was going to be shot on Friday morning at a film studio in uptown Manhattan. I should get there by nine o'clock and check with the wardrobe people about my costume. Meanwhile I should also report to the movie's casting agent to have my picture taken and to fill out some forms.

The agent's office was on Central Park West, and the next day I went to see her. She explained that she specialized in casting extras, and her walls were lined with photographs of extraneous-looking people. She was a woman who had seen a lot of faces, and as she stood me against a wall and peered into her Polaroid camera, I thought I heard a small sigh.

"Where did Woody find *you?*" she asked.

In the winter of 1963 I got a call from an editor at the *Saturday Evening Post.* The magazine wanted an article about a hot new comic who was playing at a club in Greenwich Village; everyone said he was going to be the next big talent. Sure, sure, I thought; great new comics come along every day and are never heard from again. I asked what the comic's name was. His name was Woody Allen. That didn't sound promising either. But I agreed to write the piece, and a few nights later my wife and I turned up at the Village Gate.

It was an enormous barn, depressingly dark and empty; not many people had come out to catch the hot new comic. But suddenly I be-

✪ WILLIAM ZINSSER is a writer, editor, and teacher. The revised sixth edition of his book *On Writing Well* will be published in the spring.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came aware that an amazing jazz pianist was at work. Through the gloom I made out a pallid man in dark glasses, curled intently over the keyboard, caressing harmonies out of it that were highly cerebral but also highly emotional. "The comic's not going to be any good," I said to my wife, "but at least I've found a great piano player." It was Bill Evans, who would become the most influential jazz pianist of his generation.

The comic, however, was no less an original artist. A frail and seemingly terrified young man, blinking out at the audience through black-framed glasses, Woody Allen at twenty-seven was already a veteran of writing sketches for Sid Caesar and other giants of television's golden age of comedy. But as a performer of his own material he was still a novice; at his first gigs his manager had had to push him trembling onto the stage.

Allen's monologue consisted of telling the story of his life. It was the life of a chronic loser, told in a rapid salvo of jokes: "As a boy I was ashamed to wear glasses. I memorized the eye chart and then on the test they asked essay questions." "I won two weeks at an interfaith camp, where I was sadistically beaten by boys of all races." The jokes, though simple, were unfailingly funny, and beneath the humor they were doing serious work as autobiography. This was a champion nebbish, one that every underdog in America could—and soon would—identify with. Allen had invented a perfect formula for an anxious new age: therapy made hilarious. A few days later I interviewed him to learn the details of the life I had heard refracted in the jokes—"my father and mother were called to school so often that my friends still recognize them in the street," he told me—and my article was the first long piece to take note of his arrival as America's resident neurotic.

In 1970 I moved to New Haven to teach writing at Yale. During those years Allen not only came of age as a movie writer and director, with *Sleeper, Love and Death, Annie Hall, Interiors,* and *Manhattan.* He emerged in full bloom as an essayist, contributing to *The New Yorker* almost fifty pieces that raised literary humor to new altitudes. He was obviously the true descendant of his hero, S. J. Perelman, and I used his work in my teaching.

I knew from following Woody's career that he had been a pioneer wearer of sneakers in fashion-proud Manhattan. At Yale I had also gone casual and was seldom out of sneakers myself. But I was prepared to kick the habit when I returned to New York in the summer of 1979; I wasn't going to disgrace my native city or myself with rube behavior. What I hadn't known was that during my decade away from New York its sartorial codes would disintegrate. People now appeared to be walking around in little more than their underwear, and when the fall theater season opened I was surprised to see men attending Broadway plays in sweaters. I continued to wear a coat and tie, but sneakers were on my feet more often than my upbringing would have thought proper.

One Saturday in the spring of 1980 I was walking down Madison Avenue. Suddenly my eyes fixed on a pair of sneakers walking toward me, and the wearer of those sneakers seemed to fix on mine. It was as if the sneakers recognized each other. We both stopped, and I saw that it was Woody Allen. We stood for a few minutes and talked about our work and about writers and writing. Then we went our separate ways and I didn't give it any further thought. In Allen's brain, however, one last neuron must have fired, for it was a week later that Sandra called to ask whether I would like to be in Woody's new movie.

Promptly at nine on Friday morning, I showed up at the movie studio and was sent upstairs to a wardrobe room and given my costume. It was the habit of a Catholic priest. I thought of all my Protestant forebears; they would just have to understand that I was doing this for my art. The somber black robe fit me well, its white clerical collar snug around my neck, and I went back down feeling holy enough to administer a sacrament. Woody Allen was standing on the set, which was the interior of a shabby passenger train.

"Do I look spiritual enough for you?" I asked him.

"Those aren't spiritual glasses," he said. The director of the visually impeccable *Interiors* wasn't going to have a Catholic priest caught wearing the horn-rimmed spectacles of an Ivy League WASP. He called for a prop woman, who came with a cardboard box full of glasses. Picking fastidiously among them, he fished out exactly the pair that would be worn by a blue-collar parish priest in Queens. They were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made of chrome, they had wide side pieces, and they were ugly. I put them on and looked at myself in a mirror. There was no sign of the kindly face that normally gazed back at me. The man in the mirror was an unforgiving man of God.

What was being filmed was part of the opening sequence of *Stardust Memories*, which served as a prologue to the movie itself. It took the form of a surrealist fantasy. Two trains are proceeding on parallel tracks. One is full of beautiful people and one is full of ugly people. Woody Allen is trapped on the ugly people's train, and he looks with longing at the people on the other train: handsome Edwardian men in white flannels and boaters with tennis racquets and croquet mallets, laughing women in long white dresses and Gibson-girl hats, twirling parasols.

Frantic to get off the losers' train, Allen begins by pulling on the bell cord. In his hands it's a comic prop fit for Harold Lloyd, and his efforts to stop the train lead only to entanglement. Next he appeals to the conductor, showing him his ticket and pointing to the adjacent train. The conductor studies the ticket impassively and hands it back. Desperate, Allen scans the rows of ugly passengers and sees one last hope of salvation: a Catholic priest. That was my moment.

The sequence took all morning to film. There was the usual quest for perfection: the fussing with lights and angles and sound, the reshooting of scenes that didn't satisfy Allen or his cinematographer, Gordon Willis. Finally it was time for my scene, and Allen gave me my instructions. I was to show no emotion when he approached me as a supplicant. It was the best possible directing advice for someone who has no idea how to act and would ruin a scene by trying to. I'm a person who doesn't photograph well; if a photographer asks me to smile I contort my cheeks in a weird simulacrum of mirth. But to show *no* emotion is easy; anyone can keep his face blank. It's also the perfect response dramatically—the ultimate nightmare for any petitioner seeking help.

Without boasting, I can say that I gave Allen no glimmer of hope when he came pleading. No matter how many takes were required to solve Gordon Willis's technical problems, some of which were related to a jouncing mechanism under the seat that made the train appear to be moving, my performance was steely in its discipline, and when it was over—all six seconds of it—I turned in my ecclesiastical garb and left. I had the rest of my life to look back on my movie career.

But it wasn't over. Several months later the phone rang and a familiar voice said, "Bill, honey, this is Sandra at Woody Allen's office. We need you for another scene."

Sandra explained that the final destination of the ugly people's train is a city dump, where everyone is discharged to wander over acres of garbage. The scene had been filmed the previous fall at a dump in New Jersey, but the weather was cold and everyone's breath was showing. Allen wanted to shoot it again, this time at the main New York City dump next to Jamaica Bay, near Kennedy airport, the biggest dump in the world. As a new addition to the cast of train passengers, I was needed among the dump walkers. Sandra said the bus would leave from Vesey Street, in lower Manhattan, at 5:30 A.M. the following Tuesday. Could I be there?

"I'll be there," I said. "What about my costume?"

"Not to worry," she said.

On Tuesday morning, earlier than I've reported for any task since basic training in World War II, I found a large bus parked in the pre-dawn darkness of Vesey Street. Most of the ugly people were already on it; extras are so dependent on their occasional day's work, one of them told me, that they take no chance of being late. Their aspiration is to graduate to a "five-liner," the next higher union job, which calls for five lines of dialogue. During our long day together, with its endless waiting around, also reminiscent of the army, I found them to be men and women of deep resignation and good cheer.

Our bus took us across the East River and through the lightening streets to a senior citizens' center in outer Queens, near Far Rockaway, where, in a recreation room, our costumes were neatly hanging on coatracks. Seeing my priest's habit and my chrome glasses waiting for me, I understood that in film production, as in baseball, it's not over till it's over; costumes stay rented for the duration. I changed into my holy attire and several of the extras called me "Father" and asked for a blessing. The sun finally came up.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Back on the bus, we proceeded to the dump, a vast range of hills made entirely of garbage. Sanitation trucks kept arriving with garbage from all over the city and seagulls came screaming down to meet them. It was an ideal landscape for a surrealistic movie: a place at the end of the world, alien and desolate. We were told that Woody Allen had visited the dump the previous day to decide where he wanted to shoot our walk. He chose a spot where the garbage was piled in a configuration that pleased his artistic eye, and that's where our bus now arrived to meet him and the crew. But Allen had forgotten that garbage doesn't hold still. Monday's picturesque formations had been compacted under new truckloads of trash, and the panorama that greeted him on Monday wouldn't do. Shooting would be delayed until he got the garbage rearranged.

The Sanitation Department had evidently been told to cooperate with the filmmakers, for soon we saw trucks with new garbage making their way up the mountain. Galvanized by their approach, Allen turned into Toscanini, conducting each driver to where he wanted the load dumped, until at last a high wall of garbage had risen not far from where we were standing. The air was scented with the refuse and unfinished meals of seven million New Yorkers, and new gulls descended in noisy armadas. Woody was satisfied.

Our assignment as outcasts from the ugly people's train was to trudge aimlessly across the garbage, looking dazed and forlorn. It wasn't hard to feel like a lost soul; we were in a land of lunar strangeness. Underfoot, the terrain was damp and fetid, grabbing at our shoes. Allen placed his camera so that we would be framed against his wall of garbage. It loomed behind us like a mountaineer's cliff, sealing us off.

So began what would stretch into hours of walking on the dump. On one level it was one of the most interesting days I ever spent, wholly outside the normal experience of a lifetime. Cinematically, however, it was tedious work. The skies were gray, and the sporadic sun reflected off the garbage unevenly. Allen and Willis wanted to make sure that whatever sequences they shot would match one another in quality of light and density of seagull. They shot us from a distance, straggling across the tundra, and they shot us in close-up when we came near, our faces etched with loathing at our fate. But perfection eluded them, and at midday we were sent off for a break.

When we returned after lunch the unthinkable had happened: our seagulls were gone. Fleets of sanitation trucks were dumping new loads about one hundred yards away, and our gulls had flown over to get a fresher meal. We needed new gulls so that the afternoon scenes would match the morning scenes. Word went out, trucks arrived with new garbage to top off our old garbage, and the gulls came screaming back. Shooting resumed, and in midafternoon, on a peak in Queens, my movie career really did come to an end.

Stardust Memories opened in September, and a few days before the premiere my phone rang. "Bill, honey," a voice said, "this is Beverly at Woody Allen's office. There's going to be a screening tomorrow night at the Coronet Theater for everyone connected with the picture. You're welcome to come and bring any guests." I called my wife and children, and the next night we all went to the Coronet to see Daddy in the movies.

Around me I recognized quite a few of my fellow uglies from the train and the dump. But they weren't the only freaks in the theater. Uglies were everywhere! It was as if we had all been sprinkled with some mutational dust coming through the lobby. To my relief, the lights went down and the movie began. I was nervous—would my debut be a success?—but soon the worst was over. My face, enormous on the screen, was cold enough to scare even a venial sinner, and when it later reappeared in a close-up at the dump I was proud to see that it was still unleavened by the quality of mercy. I could relax and enjoy the rest of the film.

Actually it was a querulous movie, not all that enjoyable. Allen plays a celebrity comedy writer who yearns to be allowed to make a serious picture and to be taken seriously as an artist. Instead he is hounded by his adoring fans at a film festival in the Catskills and at other public appearances, the resentful prisoner of his fame. Like its prologue, the movie took an owlish view of humanity. All those fans swarming over Allen—the Hieronymus Bosch school of filmmaking—were as ugly as the passengers on the train and at the dump. Now I understood who all the men and women

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around me in the theater were; the casting agent had done her job well. When the movie ended and the audience spilled out onto the sidewalk, passersby strolling up Third Avenue stopped in wonderment at so much genetic disarray.

After the film was released, I heard from some of my former students at Yale. As master of one of Yale's large residential colleges, I had known many undergraduates. But when I handed them their diplomas they had every right to expect that I would no longer keep popping into their lives as an authority figure. It was their bad luck, however, to be Woody Allen's natural constituency, and as soon as *Stardust Memories* opened, they flocked to see it. When my stern clerical visage jumped out of the giant screen, I was told, startled cries went up from various parts of the theater. It was the sound of Mother Yale's sons and daughters regressing to the womb. They hadn't graduated after all.

I was sorry to have caused them such a traumatizing moment. But as I look back on my movie career I have a larger regret. I never got called "Bill, honey" again.

Family Portrait

REBECCA LEE YATES

I am the one in that picture there
looking earnest at four,
squinting into the sun.
I am the one with one foot forward
and Papa's hands on my shoulders
holding me back.
I am the one with one ear different,
I heard what whistled the dog.
I am the little one in the sleeveless shirt
wanting the wind on my arms,
the one with pebbles in her pockets, little feathers and
twine,
The one who couldn't hide the way she would hold the world.
There is no hope in anyone else's eyes.
I was the only one with a prayer.

✪ REBECCA LEE YATES is a lawyer in Juneau, Alaska. Her poems have appeared in *Daughters of Sarah* and *Calapooya College.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Paternal Imperative

DAVID GUTMANN

I used to think of myself as a rebellious son; but now this essay is in defense of the traditional father—the responsible, authoritative paterfamilias. I hold that, while strong fathers can be a real pain, difficult, sometimes even oppressive toward their wives and children, they do get the job done. Routinely, they oversee the evolution of little boys—every man jack of them a potential sociopath—into productive men and responsible, even sensitive fathers. They accomplish this miracle by sponsoring a crucial transition in their son's development. I refer to an evolution that their wives, unaided by fathers, cannot bring about on their own: the psychological separation of the son from the mother.

The traditional father enforces a major rule of masculine development, one recognized, in ritual and in common practice by all successful human societies. At some culturally designated point boys have to separate, in the psychological sense, from their mothers. Unlike girls, who share a common biological destiny with their mothers, most boys will become fathers; and like their fathers, their work will engage them—whether as hunters, soldiers, or traveling salesmen—on the communal periphery with other men, rather than close to home, with their mothers or wives. Men exemplify the principle of closeness through distance; they sustain the home by their readiness, when called upon, to leave the home.

I shall preface my argument by first quoting the great ethnographer Ralph Linton, who in 1945 wrote: "In some ways, each man is like all other men; in some ways, each man is like some other men; and in some ways, each man is like no other man." Linton was referring to the major orders of human experience. His first level—"each man . . . like all other men"—points to our common, universal ways of underwriting individual and species survival. The psychology that pertains to this level comes from psychodynamic conflict theory—it is the psychology of the id and the language of war—defense, resistance, drive, conflict, breakthrough, boundary, and the rest.

Linton's second level—"each man . . . like some other men"— refers to the fact that we share common language and common culture as well as common ways of achieving language and culture with some socially designated members of our species. This level refers also to the ways in which we preserve our loved ones and our communities, while presenting ourselves to our fellows as proper social beings. The pertinent psychology comes from attachment theory, whose master term is *relationships*, and whose master premise is that the primary human drive is for connection with others.

Linton's third level—"each man is like no other man"—refers to the ways in which we experience ourselves and maintain ourselves as unique and extraordinary, different even from those with whom we share a common culture.

To be fully appreciated, the father's crucial functions must be studied via the methods and instruments that are fitted to the universals, to Linton's first level. These, however, are currently out of fashion: they remind us of forces that operate outside of conscious control, even as they influence the direction and

✪ DAVID GUTMANN, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at Northwestern University, is the author of *Reclaimed Powers: Men and Women in Later Life* and *The Human Elder: In Nature, Culture and Society*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

content of conscious thinking. The tectonic forces of the psyche that propel level one experience are unsympathetic to our amour propre: they remind us that we are not even the masters in our own mental house.

Humanistic psychologists predictably deplore the authoritative father. He is, they fear, expressing masculine needs to be dominant and "phallocentric" at the expense of his wife's individuality and "self-actualization." Thus, on the best campuses (and especially the best) biological paternity—the special role of the father in procreation—has been split off in theory from the social condition of fatherhood. Biological paternity is an undeniable fact of nature; but fatherhood, particularly in its patricentric phrasing (as a unique status, with its own scope, powers, and responsibilities) has come to be regarded by mainstream social scientists as a corruption of nature.

And so we find that too many men, happy to be let off the hook, have heard the liberating message from academic thinkers. They are helping to conceive more babies and more candidates for abortion than ever before, but they are, in growing numbers, refusing to be trustworthy, strong, and responsible fathers. According to the new dispensation, this liberation of men from bondage to the patriarchal ideal should lead to the liberation of women. It has not. For as men defect from the traditional version of fatherhood, they also defect from the traditional arrangements of marriage—and from marriage itself. As a consequence, too many women are left alone with the kids in single-parent families. Women are more oppressed than ever. The patriarch has gone, but so are the special rations of security and companionship that he provided. Clearly, the sociological and humanistic revisions of fatherhood are not working. Instead, we are recognizing—perhaps too late—that the patriarchal phrasings of fatherhood were more than expressions of oppressive male politics; it appears that they, too, were an extension rather than a corruption of the same natural laws that governed biological paternity.

If we are going to develop some real insight, beyond political correctitude, into a central mystery of paternity—how do little sons become, in the space of only a few years, fathers in their own right?—we will have to forage through the data and conceptions of the language of human universals. For when we neglect the inevitable element of conflict in father-son relations, we ignore a critical feature of the male bond in the family and a major contribution to the son's development as a man and future father.

But before taking up the evolution of sons into fathers, we should first consider its context: the special needs, universal across our species, of the uniquely vulnerable human child. This vulnerability is always taken into account by any human group set on survival. Despite differences in their child rearing, most societies maintain common understandings about the generic needs to be addressed by any child-care regime. They recognize that, to thrive, the vulnerable child must be assured of two kinds of parental nurturance. It must be given some assurance of physical security and of emotional security.

There is also a general recognition, across our species, that the same parent cannot provide both kinds of security. The child's physical security ultimately depends on activities carried out far from home: warfare, hunting (including the hunt for business and clients), and the cultivation of distant tillage. Men are generally assigned the task of providing physical security on the perimeter, not because they are more privileged, but because they are more expendable. In the hard calculus of species survival, there is typically an oversupply of males: one man can inseminate many females, but women, on the average, can gestate only one child every two years during their relatively brief time of fertility. But the surplus males, those over the number required to maintain reasonable population levels, can be assigned to the dangerous, high-casualty tasks on which physical security and survival are based. "When it comes to slaughter, you do not send your daughter," is one of our most predictable human rules; and there are very good reasons for it: societies do not expose the vulnerable uterus, during its brief season of youthful fertility, to machine-gun fire. Women are generally assigned to secure areas, there to supply the formative experiences that give rise to emotional security in children.

This is a large generalization, but the cross-cultural record bears it out. George Murdoch's (1935) tables, based on ethnographic data from 224 subsistence-level societies, indicate that any productive or military activity

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

requiring a protracted absence from the home—hunting, trapping, herding, deep-sea fishing, offensive warfare—is performed almost exclusively by males. Activities carried out closer to home—dairy farming, erecting and dismantling shelters, harvesting, tending kitchen gardens and fowl—are sometimes exclusive to men, more often exclusive to women, but are in most instances carried out by both sexes. Hearth-side activities, particularly those having to do with preserving and preparing food and with the care of young children, are almost exclusively the province of women.

Sociologists cannot explain these findings by Murdock. These findings can only point to a species regularity, an expression of our biopsychological nature, and not to some pansocial masculine conspiracy to keep women barefoot and pregnant in their domestic prisons. Incontestably, men are creatures of the perimeter; and while they start out swaddled to their mothers in the home, they must eventually leave it for the extra-domestic world. Later, as fathers, they must re-enter that domain and eventually work out a schedule of movement, often on a daily basis, between some version of the perimeter and the intimacies of the domestic zone. Tough-love fathers (those who successfully coordinate conflict and attachment) are vital agents in the son's evolution away from his family of orientation, and in his later happy return, as husband and father, to the family of procreation that he and his wife have conceived.

Here then is a central paradox of masculine development: The psycho-umbilical ("Golden Cord") tie to the mother is crucial at the beginning of life, but it must, at some critical point, be severed. The boy who persists beyond the proper season as a mother's son will be psychologically vulnerable to the otherwise routine separations inherent in living: in youth, he is at risk to become an addicted delinquent; in adulthood he will probably be an envious brother rather than a good enough father to his own children, while his wife or successive wives will be drained by his chronic neediness and in peril from his violent rages towards women. In later life—if he makes it that far—he may well be a depressed psychosomatic cripple and a drain on the health system.

We cannot comprehend the transformation of little boys into adequate fathers in their own right without taking into account the father's part in sponsoring this vital evolution away from the mother (and eventually away from the father as well). Again, the father's role must judiciously mingle conflict and attachment: sometimes he has to be a buddy, sometimes he has to set an example; sometimes he has to be the disciplinarian, the adversary, and the goad.

Currently, the father's role (when it is recognized at all) is straight attachment-theory babble: father as backup for the mother, father as buddy, father as coach of Little League skills, father as someone who cries with you and feels your pain. But sentimentalized attachment theory can lead to paternal malpractice. The father who can eventually sponsor the son's separation from the mother must be *respected* as well as loving and loved. Filial respect is not routinely given to the warm-fuzzy father—he can be loved, but also disparaged, and even pitied.

But respect is only accorded to the firm father, the father who is not afraid of his legitimate power and authority, not afraid of being temporarily hated by his own children. This does not mean that he cannot share in housework, babysitting, diaper changing, and all the rest of it. He can do all that, but he still must have a unique role, often disciplinary or confrontational in nature, that distinguishes him and that he does not share with the mother. If the father is more than a mere copy of the mother, if he stands out as a *presence*, distinct from her, he will be, at the proper time, useful to his son. When the time comes for the son to unravel himself from the mother, he will find, in the father, a guide who has already accomplished, with some measure of zest, that important task in his own day.

Psychologically sophisticated feminists recognize that his dependency on the mother poses a problem for her son—and in their view this leads to stigmatization of the mother. To break away, they argue, the boy has to demonize his mother, and—as an adult—join the male conspiracy to keep her down. The problem would be eased, for mothers as well as sons, if the father, besides helping with the housework, also shared the emotional nurture of his son. In other words, instead of helping the son overcome his dependency, the father—in order to remove the stigma of moth-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

erhood—should sponsor it. In this calculus, the father gives up his classic role of sponsoring separation and takes up a role, consistent with New Wave psychology, of sponsoring continued attachment.

But the failure to separate has bad consequences for fathers and for sons. Fathers who are no more than clones of the mother are at risk to desert the marriage, and often at crucial junctures in child rearing. Make no mistake, no matter how elegantly it is stated, the rhetoric of androgynous, equal-opportunity child rearing is fraudulent: despite all the psychobabble about "sharing," the father who is no more than a second mother will also play second fiddle in child rearing. For starters, the mother has known an intimate connection with her baby as part of her own flesh months before the father even saw his son. Then, too, even bottle-fed babies get a nursing experience from mothers that they are not likely to receive from the bony chests and brusquer motions of their fathers.

When it comes to attachment, fathers are always playing catch-up. Fathers know this; and unless they can carve out a unique and *necessary* function, one based on authority and opposition as well as love, they will too often feel demeaned. To restore pride, they are likely to desert the home ground for those masculine default habitats—the barroom, the battlefield, the adulterous bed—where they can feel like men, rather than failed mothers. The "Divorce Culture," whose destructive consequences for children have recently been documented by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, is in large part sponsored by men who want a final separation—not only from a particular spouse, but from the institution of the marriage itself.

And given some likely alternatives, paternal desertion can even be the more desirable outcome: fathers who stay in the home, despite feeling demeaned there, may fall back on the guaranteed male specialty of violence. If they are not respected for their unique contribution to the nest, they may attempt to gain the respect that comes with fear, the kind of respect that is automatically accorded to the brute.

But what does the neglected conflict theory have to say concerning the father's role in son rearing? These theorists push us to acknowledge that, besides being the buddy or the alternate mother, the father is at crucial points the necessary antagonist of his own beloved son. Sometimes the father has to be the uncompromising authoritarian who enforces the law that he himself lives by, sets limits, and sternly punishes any violations. The confrontational father has to demonstrate to his son that he values principle, even above love; and that when filial love is withdrawn he can draw on his own fund of esteem. He makes this point by drawing and holding a line in the sand, even if the son hates him for doing it. *That* is how the father gains his standing in the family: by demonstrating conviction, rather than by flaunting his superior upper-body strength.

Bear in mind that the father—whether attachment-prone or confrontational—does not get into the act of being a parent in any direct fashion until the end of the neonatal period. At the outset of life, the mother-child merger—a continuation in psychological terms of the intrauterine umbilical link—is primary, and the father, as during the prenatal period, plays only an incidental role. Using cross-cultural research, Niles Newton found that mothers are always central in the care of the neonate—whether a boy or a girl—and that fathers play only an auxiliary post-natal support function. Newton's ethnographic descriptions of young mothers in South Africa, the Middle East, and China all point to a standard pattern of maternal engrossment with the infant, in a psychic symbiosis that can persist through the first years of the child's life. In all these places, the infant sleeps next to the mother, is nursed at the first sign of restlessness, and nursing takes precedence over any potentially competing activity.

The mother can devote herself almost exclusively to child care because she herself is being nurtured—"mothered," that is to say, by her husband. The father's task is not to share the mother's chores, but to maintain a protected, neutral zone, one in which his gratified and secure wife can bring about the mother-child bond that fosters the infant's necessary quotient of what Erik Erikson has called "basic trust." Assured of a stable maternal base, one that he can trust to be there even when he goes away, the infant can begin to explore his world and even provoke change in it. Human development proceeds by paradox, and in a dialectical fashion: the almost

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exclusive mother-child symbiosis that is so crucial in the first months of life prepares for the period of early autonomy, when the child will practice psychological and physical separation from the mother.

In effect, the nursing mother sponsors the son's first steps towards separation from the mother and his future alliance with the father. Through her offices, the boy reaches a point where the "I-Thou" distinction appears, and the father—like himself, an entity distinct from the mother—acquires the tonus of reality, of unremitting and trustworthy "thereness." As the linear arrangement of the family—father tends mother, mother tends kids—begins to break down, the father who nurtures, the father who is different from the mother, becomes a psychological constant, a fixed presence in the emotional life of the child.

The father spreads an umbrella of security under which the son can temporarily shelter, even as he continues to become a distinct person, in his own right. The father whose special, "patriarchal" virtues distinguish him from the Magna Mater, becomes in the proper season what the psychoanalysts call a "transitional object"—a kind of psychological halfway house. Standing apart from the mother, the father provides a secure way station on the son's psychological voyage away from her, and allows that risky but compelling evolution to go forward.

When it comes to understanding the ambivalent, potentially tragic relationship between fathers and sons, love is not enough. After all, as Desmond Morris reminds us, fathers and sons are not too far away (on the evolutionary time scale) from a shared primate heritage of violent male-to-male, father-to-son rivalry for sexual possession of reproductive females—an erotic menu that includes the son's mother and the father's mate. As a species we are protected, by the incest taboo, against the wilder expression of that competition, but the primate behaviors that the naked ape inhibits in its musculature are still conserved inside the head as potent and even murderous fantasies.

The small sons of patriarchal fathers come to realize, however grudgingly, that they cannot appropriate the father's prerogatives and powers by force. At this juncture they are ready to receive another bulletin from the reality principle: "if you can't lick 'em, join 'em." Young sons give up infantile, omnipotent fantasies of acquiring the father's powers by violence in favor of a disciplined filial apprenticeship built on identification with him and his powers. From then on, the boy's sense of himself will be based increasingly on experiences of real mastery rather than on hectic Superman fantasies.

Contrary to attachment theory, the boy is finally able truly to appreciate his father *after* he has cooled out the conflict between them. His rivalrous anger is now directed away from the father, and towards himself. The boy is less prone to disparage the father, more prone to censure himself; and the father, newly freed from filial criticism and censure, can be admired, appreciated, loved. The quondam mother's son has switched allegiances and is ready to be reborn as the father's son.

He can willingly take instruction from him, and from other authoritative figures: uncles, older brothers, teachers, coaches. During the so-called latency period, the school, the team, the congregation of male peers becomes a world in its own right, a setting for new growth that supersedes the family.

In short, the boy's rebellion against the real father "out there" gives way to an inner and unrelenting contention with the psychic representation of the father as the harsh, unforgiving aspect of conscience. This is the strict inner monitor that converts his outward-directed aggression back against himself in the form of guilt; which will not let him hurt—or even think of hurting—those that he either loves or should love.

But rigid self-restriction is not the whole story. Moral suffering pays the dues for moral strength. Via the superego the son gains an internal (and therefore trustworthy) sense of resource: so long as he acts in the service of his community, and against the enemies (including destructive potentials within himself) of his loved ones, he will have access to his own vital energies, his own iron rations of the psyche. Now he can survive emotionally without the mother, and he is, in the psychological sense, weaned. With his internal logistics assured, the boy is ready to slip the psychic umbilicus and to make his lasting graduation from the status of "mother's son."

The boy's new affection for the mother is no longer a by-product of their prior merger;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

instead (and paradoxically), it is a consequence of the psychological separation that the father has helped to bring about. For it is only after this internal decoupling has been achieved, and boys no longer desperately need their mothers, that they can really love them—and women in general—in a relatively uncomplicated, full-hearted way. As they come to feel whole within themselves, they no longer need to be completed through the connection to the mother—or to other women as her surrogates.

Latency entails an eased relation with both parents; but it is only a temporary calm before the storm of adolescence shakes up the psychological *status quo*. Now the adolescent personality is subject to tectonic shocks as the body, heeding its own genetic drums, stumbles toward sexual maturity and adult physical powers. There is no mind-body dichotomy in human psychology, and the swelling, surgent, erotic body sends shock waves through the whole psychological system. Boys are suddenly launched—whether they like it or not—into adult bodies, even as their earlier emotional states are revived. The adolescent boy's challenge to the father is now more than the grandiose delusion of a physical and mental midget; it is suddenly backed up by a body that can be more powerful and quicker than the slackening physique of his middle-aged father.

The disorderly transition to adolescence is of course universal; but aggravated adolescent rebellion is not. Most healthy cultures have developed fairly standard ways of ensuring that the bio-psychological shake-up does not lead to individual pathology or to social crisis. Particularly in traditional societies, the whole age-grade of male elders is mobilized to back up the father's threatened authority, to turn the boy back toward the perimeter and the ways of men. The biological father helps the son achieve the first vital separation, from the mother: the collective fathers are mobilized to bring about the second great separation, from the family as a whole, and later from the physical precincts of the home community.

Typically, the collective fathers arrange an ordeal, a *rite de passage*, through which the son is consecrated to the patriarchal ideals. These rituals take as many forms as there are distinct cultures, but they are never unambiguous expressions of paternal love. Thus, the young candidates for manhood must pay heavy dues of pain and terror to the fathers before they are allowed to join their company as acknowledged men. The ordeals of passage can range from penile subincision with cowry shells as practiced by Papuan natives to the bar mitzvah ceremonial of orthodox Jews. But in all cases the young candidates are exposed to a trial, usually under the attentive, critical gaze of the assembled fathers, who monitor them for signs of weakness.

A culture is frequently founded on an origin myth: a story of how the people, at some time of trial and supreme danger were sponsored, rescued, and rendered special by the intervention of usually supernatural but unquestionably *unordinary* beings. We think of Moses among the Israelites; George Washington at Valley Forge; and more recently Martin Luther King. The typical puberty ritual replays this drama in a summarized form: like his people in the origin myth, the candidate is in a liminal condition, a state of emergency; and if he survives the ordeal, it is because he, too, like his people in the founding myth, has found favor with a totemic sponsor. As a young child, he became for a time the son of his father; now, as a youth, he becomes, through the ritual, the protégé of some favoring deity whose supernatural powers—his "medicine" or mana—will provide the candidate with luck and protection on the road.

As a result, the *rite de passage* extends, for the candidate, the range of paternity: now it reaches beyond the biological father, beyond the collectivity of community elders, to include the ultimate fathers—the spiritualized ancestors, and the gods.

The anthropologists John Whiting and Irving Child found that the severity of the ordeal varied, across cultures, with the length of the breastfeeding period. The ritual marks a final passage away from the mother; and since late weaning implies a strong maternal bond, a stringent ordeal is required to break it. By this token, if the boy is too visibly frightened or tearful, then he has not passed the test: he is still his mother's crybaby "Mama's boy," and he has not been reborn—as a father's son and junior colleague—into the company of men. But if the boy endures with some grace and fortitude, then he has begun to make it as a man. Now he is one of the "twice born:" reborn as a son of the collective fathers, as a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

protégé of taboo powers, and as an age-grade brother of the initiates who have endured, with him, their people's basic training.

The boy's new alliances with the extended fathers add to his sense of inner resource: the conviction of having captured some of the totemic "father's" substance. With the "father" essence now held securely inside, the son can visualize being a father in his own right to his own children. Knowing that he can leave the home, the community, and its women, knowing that he can live on his own, the son can look towards mating, marriage, and fatherhood for himself. Like his father before him, he can court a woman, he can attempt the frightening but exciting voyage into her body, and—secure in his manhood—he can return to the domestic world, the mother's world that he has recently "escaped." But he returns not as a needy and troublesome child. Knowing that he can leave home if he has to, he comes back as a mate, and as a providing father. He can live again among the "mothers," and he can turn a woman into a mother, without becoming her child, without collapsing back into the childish condition.

His passage into young manhood has inoculated the son against the dangers of the female in the world and in himself; and, not less important, it also inoculates the community against masculine violence. In his passage toward manhood, the son's aggression has been transformed: the civilizing offices of his father, as backed up by the communal and totemic fathers, have been consolidated in his conscience; through its offices, the son's potentially anti-social aggression has been given a positive, pro-social sign. In effect, the boy's aggression follows the general line of masculine evolution: as he becomes, in the psychological sense, his father's son, and moves his sights beyond the mother's domain, his aggressive potentials track with him and find new, non-domestic targets. From now on, his enemies will not be found in his own house or community; these precincts he will preserve and protect as demilitarized zones, where his children and other dependents can feel secure. His enemies, if any, will come to him from outside his own house, from beyond the communal periphery—or he will forage beyond his own settlements to find them.

In our time, legions of boys grow up under the ambiguous familial arrangements that are rapidly replacing normal fatherhood in America. What, we have to ask, is the likely fate of sons who come of age without a father, or with fathers who are little more than androgynous, ineffectual clones of the mother? At least one consequence is clear: in the absence of compelling fathers, the mother's presence fills not only the outer domestic frame, but also her son's interior psychic space. These boys—the offspring of single women, lesbian couples, or devalued fathers—are not likely, in their proper season, to win true psychological distance from their mothers.

True, the sons of patriarchal fathers can also be flawed, and precisely along the fault lines that gender feminists have industriously catalogued: besides being priggish, Philistine, and unable to cry, they are distressingly prone to patronize and even diminish women. But despite all his pretensions, the patron is also a protector; and father's sons are for the most part reliable defenders of their mothers, wives, girlfriends, and daughters. When killing is the argument, they fight the men who come from the outside to hurt or kill their women and kids. Strong mothers build secure homes; fathers and father's sons maintain secure neighborhoods.

But un-fathered sons deploy their aggression indiscriminately: they can be murderously aggressive within the home as well as outside of it. They are prone to abuse, and even kill their aging relatives, their wives, their kids, and their neighbors. Un-fathered sons destroy the homes and the neighborhoods that mothers, fathers, and father's sons had once built. As feminists have documented, men can be brutal toward women; but in this charge, no distinction is made between father's sons and mother's sons. Father's sons, the progeny of patriarchy, may show a talent and an appetite (particularly in wartime) for killing other men; but indiscriminate masculine violence against women is a guaranteed side effect of the unbuffered matricentric family. Without reliable fathers to oversee their timely separation from mothers, mother's sons are left with little recourse but to hack violently at the golden cord.

Boys who cannot achieve true psychological distance from the mother fall back instead on unreliable substitutes: physical distance and social distance. Physical distance they achieve

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by flight: from the mother's home to the streets, to the fighting gangs that rule them, and, at the end of the day, to the all-male fraternity of the penitentiary. Social distance they gain through violence: unable finally to split from the mother, they provoke her—through criminality, addictions, sexual exploitation, and physical threats—to the point where she bars them from her decent house. They use violence to drop out of the mother's cultural world, and off her scale of values; and, once evicted to the streets, they turn to booze and drugs for the transient comfort that they can no longer take (nor expect to receive) from their mother's hand.

Through such desperate means, fatherless sons demonstrate—to their peers, to their mothers, and to themselves—that they are truly men, and not needy little mama's boys. By their physical violence and verbal raps on women, they try, ineffectually, to kill off the unrelinquished "woman"—the psychic afterimage of the mother within themselves.

In the absence of reliable fathers and elders, young men try to create their own puberty rituals. They self-administer their own ad hoc initiations. In the fathering society, the tests of manhood are administered by the male elders; and these trials are basic training for discipline, lawfulness, and manly productivity. But in the tests conducted by unsupervised gangs of adolescent males, the candidate proves his courage by violating some law of nature or of society; and the ritualized passage is not into responsible manhood, but too often into the world of the criminal. Instead of curbing antisocial rebellion, the puberty rites of teenage gangs are designed to validate it.

O. J. Simpson could stand as a poster boy for this syndrome. His strong and devoted mother was abandoned by her cross-dressing, homosexual husband when her son was only three. But despite her loving care (or perhaps because of it), in his teens O. J. predictably splits from her into the world of gangs and petty crime. Learning that a potentially great black athlete is screwing up, Willie Mays helps him find a track away from the mother's world that does not lead through the dangerous streets. O. J. accepts the paternal discipline of coaches and the fraternal discipline of locker rooms, goes on to win the Heisman Trophy, and becomes the legendary "Juice."

Simpson's violence toward women really blooms in mid-life, when he retires from the National Football League and loses the masculine connections of the sports world. With these he lost his "patriarchal," buffering niche against the encroaching feminine presence. Once again he is in danger of becoming a "Mama's boy" and the sissy son of the neighborhood homosexual. Despite riches and fame, Simpson's emergency antics are not much different from those of any fatherless son growing up in the white slum or the black ghetto: he divorces two wives and—dubious about his own manhood—he becomes obsessed to a psychotic degree with the presumed infidelities of his second wife. The destiny of the unfathered son spins out to its tragic end as he first assaults and then apparently kills Nicole Simpson.

Finally, then, despite their many well-documented shortcomings, patriarchal fathers are the best means that our species has devised for managing the gravest threat to organized social life: male—particularly young male—violence.

But I do not mean to imply that all un-fathered sons are fated to be wife abusers, muggers, dopeheads, or worse. The majority of mother's sons do manage to separate from the mother, at least in the social sense: for the most part, they seek and often find wives motherly enough to substitute for the actual mother. They marry women who will welcome their special need for spousal mothering. In effect, these hungry men rediscover and re-create in their wives the "rapprochement" mother described by Margaret Mahler, whom they have never really relinquished. They find in the loving wife an equivalent of the birth mother who delighted in their first exploratory steps, but who also coaxed them back into her maternal embrace.

Such pleasant women can convert the mother's sons, for a while at least, into good citizens, even into provident fathers. So long as the wife remains willing to mother her husband, these at-risk men remain stabilized. But these mother's sons are put at risk in the later years, when their post-parental wives—who have raised their kids, who have paid their species dues—begin to defect from the mothering way. These post-parental wives still share the husband's bed, they still get the meals out; but their feelings toward their husbands have subtly changed. They are still willing to be the wife, but not the husband's mother. This stray-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing older wife has imposed, on the husband, a separation from the mothering person that he himself has never before encountered, expected, or initiated.

This belated separation can precipitate, in vulnerable men, the much-debated "mid-life crisis": to hold the wife's attention, to keep her in a mothering position, predisposed men can develop significant somatic symptoms. Through them, they signal to the wife, "If you don't want to take care of me, at least be caring toward my liver, or my heart." Their symptoms also bring them to the attention of clinic personnel, internists, and nurses; and RNs can be, for such men, the final mother figures of the life cycle. The good news is that, given favorable circumstances, early difficulties can be compensated, even for a long time; the bad news is that they eventually declare themselves, sometimes so late in life that the original deficit can no longer be traced to its origins.

The early failures of separation can bring on personal and social pathology across the life span. In their youth, the mother's sons afflict others—and particularly women—with their rage; and in later life female caretakers can become victims of aggravated dependency. This country's founding myth tells of a rebellion against monarchy; and so our American society of democratic brothers has always been hostile to the patriarchal principle. Now we begin to realize the heavy costs, especially to women, of the unchecked matricentric principle that, in the name of female liberation, is arising to take its place.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Mandolin and the Tenor

(For Frank Schmitt)

NORBERT KRAPF

Winter nights when animal breath
hung frozen in the barn
you gathered wife and six
children around the woodstove
in the old farmhouse,

picked a delicate, haunting
tune on that most American
of instruments, the mandolin,

and lifted your tenor toward
the cold Indiana heavens
as you sang for the family
that most German love song
of loss, *Du, du liegst*
mir im Herzen.

I never heard your tenor,
Grandfather Frank, never saw
the mandolin kept in a closet
until it became a toy children
wore out, but the long-gone
instrument still resonates

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as your daughter, eighty-three,
tells me again the story of your life
and sings for me your sad German
song in her most frail of voices.

In return, I sing this song
of her loss of a father when
you were thirty-three. She
was only six. Your oldest child,
my godfather, was only twelve.

I leave you singing *Stille Nacht,*
heilige Nacht in your heavenly
tenor in the choir loft of the village
church on Christmas Eve and repeat
as your epitaph this refrain:
Du, du liegst mir im Herzen.

✪ NORBERT KRAPF directs the C. W. Post Poetry Center of Long Island University. His new books are *Finding the Grain: Pioneer German Journals and Letters from Dubois County, Indiana* and *Blue-Eyed Grass: Poems of Germany.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Road to Santipur

MAUREEN MICUS CRISICK

You could leave the kitchen where you've knelt
in homage to burnt toast. Close the dusty drapes.
Light is mute, wrote Dante.
Leave the washroom where your father's
voice lives in each stain.

Fill your suitcase with palette knives,
fresh tubes of paint to practice
who you never were. Fuchsias blooming
in the atrium are blinded by their own beauty.
Ants crawling on the dead bee
have a singleness of purpose.

While there's still time, before your hands
wrinkle to fig, walk past the office humdrum,
its Xerox machines duplicating, duplicating,
past boulevards of chrome cars imitating
riches. Where water begins, cross
the rope bridge and go far into the world
with its many terraces. Notice reeds poking
like hair through green skin of scum.
By tomorrow, you could wake near a slow fire,
put on hemp sandals, pour saffron tea and watch
its arc fill with light. Already the sun
is in the curve of your spoon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If you open your notebook, a hawk will
rise up, circling in the ageless heat,
stunned by your resolve. But first, the eye
must go inward. *Nature's inside,* said Cézanne.
Early light is untroubled, permits itself
anything: wild luminosity of a woman bathing
in the sea, cranes of her kimono left
to preen on the shore.

Near the banyan tree, its long legs
rooted in swamp, turn the sunning stone over
for its dark amnesia. You, on the edge
of your white dream: the bare bone of paper
still desires you. What matters is the immensity

of sky and that one bird cries in affirmation.

✪ MAUREEN MICUS CRISICK is the author of *Night Train to Budapest,* a collection of poems. Her work has appeared in *Poetry, Poet Lore,* and *Hayden's Ferry Review.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jewish Fathers

And Sons and Daughters

CAROL IANNONE

In his recent memoir, *Messages from My Father*, Calvin Trillin records a relative's favorite Jewish joke:

> A struggling young Jewish actor announces to his parents one day that he finally got a part in a legitimate production. He is to play a Jewish father. His own father can't hide a look of slight disappointment. "What's the matter?" the actor says. "Of course, I'm proud of you, son," the father says. "But we were hoping you'd get a speaking part."

It's an old joke, actually, but still funny, and with more than its grain of truth. In the work of many American Jewish playwrights, from Clifford Odets to Harvey Fierstein to Woody Allen, the belligerently nurturant Jewish mother often predominates, while a mild-mannered husband shuffles quietly in the background or lies cooperatively in the grave. In fiction, too, writers from Daniel Fuchs to Anne Roiphe have helped make the Jewish mother a more familiar literary figure than the Jewish father.

Against this backdrop, a clutch of relatively recent books about their fathers by Jewish writers can almost seem like a belated effort to redress the imbalance. Aside from Trillin's *Messages from My Father* (1996), we have *The Shadow Man: A Daughter's Search for Her Father* (1996) by Mary Gordon, whose father was a Jewish convert to Catholicism; and, further back in time, *Patrimony* (1991) by, of all people, Philip Roth, whose *Portnoy's Complaint* inflated the Jewish mother lampoon to near cosmic proportions; and *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) by the poet and novelist Paul Auster. Considered together, these memoirs tell us a lot not only about Jewish fathers but also about changing attitudes toward fatherhood and masculinity in our culture. Through them we can trace the dimensions of the shift from the generally more admiring view of fathers held by the pre–World War II generation to the more censorious view held by the post-war generation that came of age in the sixties.

Calvin Trillin's paternal family came from "near Kiev" and wound up not on the Lower East Side but in the American Midwest, first in St. Joseph, Missouri, "the home of the Pony Express and Jesse James," and then in nearby Kansas City. Just as the Kansas City Blues were a farm club for the New York Yankees, Trillin tells us dryly, so the Kansas City Jews were considered a farm club for the New York Jews; it was "chopped liver with Miracle Whip," as he puts it. His parents could speak Yiddish, but their accents in English were pure Midwestern, and his father feared no pogroms, saw no limitations, and even trusted Gentiles. "You are an American," Abe Trillin told his son.

Trillin's memoir of his father is a little slow paced and sleepy, but once we settle into its unambitious rhythms, a portrait of this admirable man unfolds to us, with his ingrained uprightness—"you may as well be a mensch," he used to say, as if that was self-evidently easy to do—his capacity for hard work, his scrupulous honesty, his modesty and simplicity ("big *k'nockers*" was his term for pretentious people), and his devotion to his family.

Abe Trillin had lost his father at an early age, had assumed responsibility not only for his own family but for his extended family as

✪ CAROL IANNONE teaches in New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study and has published in *Commentary*, the *Hudson Review*, and *Modern Age*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

well, and thus in the manner of many immigrant and first-generation men had become accustomed to a habit of selflessness. A grocer and "restaurateur," he ran his businesses well, cared about his employees, paid his bills, and cut no corners, yet he did not so much fulfill his own prospects as work so that his son might have the opportunity to fulfill his. When the elder Trillin's intermittent dream of making a fresh start in California began to conflict with his family's desire to stay with the Kansas City life they so enjoyed, he gave up the dream, and now in maturity Trillin reflects on his father's sacrifice with gratitude and perhaps a little wonder.

As it turns out, Trillin's father was indeed a quiet man, but unlike the hapless and inconsequential fathers who populate the Jewish literary imagination, he was every inch the mensch he advised his son to be. Lacking education, not personally prepossessing or powerful, he emerges as an exemplar of the subdued but confident masculinity of an earlier age. He never spoke of illness (and, alas, may not have attended to his own heart trouble soon enough), didn't approve of men's crying in public, and taught his son never to hit girls. Trillin marvels at "how much my father managed to get across to me without those heart-to-hearts that I've read about fathers and sons having in the study or in the rowboat or in the car." The obvious success the elder Trillin had in transmitting his "messages" to his son should prompt us to wonder if the total effect created by an atmosphere of love, devotion, and primary concern for family doesn't outweigh the feminized fatherhood and therapeutic garrulousness promoted today.

So solid is the silent bond of understanding between them that it easily survives an incident in a camera store when for the first time the young Calvin sees that his father does not command the same attention from strangers that he does from his son. In a kind of anti-epiphany, the elder Trillin's quiet integrity and his son's own appreciation of it are enough to withstand the cold shoulder of the world. "His values were so deeply embedded," comments Trillin, "he had such stubborn confidence in their rightness—that it would have seemed trivial to put much weight on how the world of less certain human beings might respond to him."

Philip Roth's frenetic memoir of his father's last illness and death seems different from Trillin's serenely untroubled one. Some clash of wills between elder and younger Roth had marked the relationship in years gone by, and the writing in *Patrimony* has an excited, almost panicked delight as the novelist comes to understand the worth of his father's life against the knowledge that he will soon be losing him. Herman Roth emerges as another extraordinary ordinary man with little education and no outstanding talents, who nevertheless made possible a flourishing family life that Roth now remembers with gratitude and love.

Unlike Abe Trillin, Herman Roth did not lose his own father in childhood, but he came from poverty and learned to invest himself in care, responsibility, and "unswerving dutifulness" toward both his own and his extended family. The "stubborn self-discipline" and "iron willpower" that was the source of friction with his son in bygone years may well have been the enabling factor in all the elder Roth was able to accomplish. "I raised myself up out of the immigrant streets without even a high school education," Roth imagines his father's saying as he surveys his life from the shadow of his illness. "I never knuckled under, never broke the law, never lost my courage or said 'I quit.' I was a faithful husband, a loyal American, a proud Jew, I gave two wonderful boys every opportunity I myself never had." "Without bitterness or brokenness or despair," marvels Roth, his father weathered the failure of several businesses and the premature deaths of many loved ones, including three young brothers.

As his son paints him, Herman Roth is a veritable modern-day Jewish patriarch who carries within himself the history of his family and his time and his place. He had an extraordinary memory—who had married whom and when, their children, their businesses. "It was his Deuteronomy," glosses Roth, "the history of his Israel, and . . . very few who wound up sitting across from him for any length of time didn't get at least the abridged version of his sacred text." The elder Roth had as well such a detailed memory of the streets and neighborhoods and stores and districts of his northern New Jersey hometown that his son is prompted to call him the "bard of Newark."

And anyone who had imagined that the nebbish father of *Portnoy's Complaint* was the real-life Herman Roth is in for a surprise, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will be anyone who still thinks that the life of today's senior citizen consists of rocking on the front porch. Before his illness, Herman Roth's widowered world was that of lively, older Jews, most of whom look ten years younger than their age and are still avidly interested in culture and self-improvement. (Roth's description of a less-than-professional recital at a Florida condominium—"Jack Benny played better," scoffs Herman Roth—is one of the book's understandably few laugh-aloud moments.)

Herman Roth is of course not without faults—there is a critical, bossy, bullying side—but again and again the son must admire his father's courage in facing illness, old age, and life itself. Returning from temple one day, the octogenarian Roth is accosted at gunpoint by a black youth of about fourteen. The older man has no fear, treats his assailant like a son, has him count the money he gets, and tells him not to spend it on "crap."

The stubbornness and the "relentlessness" and the "tactlessness" and the "wanting to make everybody over in the same mold" arose, Roth explains, because his father "figured if a man with all his handicaps and limitations had it in him, then anybody did. All that was required was willpower—as if willpower grew on trees." But a friend can perceive of Roth, "You've forgiven him. . . . You talk about him in a very reconciled way." In fact, when Roth revisits his old disagreements with his father he often finds that they have dissolved. A comment from his father on the decline of discipline that had sent a young Roth flying from the dinner table now finds the middle-aged Roth in philosophical acquiescence. Instead of joining in the chorus of contempt for the masculine virtues, Roth in effect comes to appreciate them and what they made possible.

The two Roths had already grown closer through the grief and loneliness of his father's widowerhood, and now the years of his illness and confrontation with death summon from his son admirable energy, thoughtfulness, and devotion. Whatever personal horrors this bad-boy novelist may have committed in other contexts, as in his bitter marriage to Claire Bloom, if the testimony of *Patrimony* is to be believed, Philip Roth cannot be a bad man. (For what it's worth, when Miss Bloom makes her infrequent appearances in this book, it is mainly as an empathetic and womanly presence.) "Philip is like a mother to me," the elder Roth says at one point to a friend.

In fact the intimacy father and son achieve leads Roth to make the biggest mistake of his book and commit a grievous trespass on his father's memory by letting us in on the private details of his wretched illness and physical deterioration. There is a moment when the two are crossing a busy street and his father a little irritably yanks out a new, uncomfortable denture and puts it into Philip's willing hand. A physical closeness grows between them that we need to be told of but not partake in, but Roth's relentless authorial energy doesn't let him filter anything out. At one point his poor father soils himself terribly and he implores his son, who dutifully and methodically and thoroughly cleans it up, never to tell anyone. But Roth disloyally proceeds to do so, in several pages of graphic detail. Like a threshing machine that someone forgot to turn off, he processes every cubic ounce of excrement into his narrative. Once this is done, the same manic force pushes him to make literary hay out of it, and he almost ruins the book by identifying the "shit" as his "patrimony." He means, ultimately, that "once you sidestep disgust and ignore nausea and plunge past those phobias that are fortified like taboos, there's an awful lot of life to cherish." All right, but we don't have to be dragged through this entire cloacal horror in order to appreciate such an insight.

The episode spoils but does not destroy the book in which Roth has rendered the man, his time, his place, his experience, and in some ways the experience of his whole cohort of first-generation American Jews: their "real work," Roth comments to a friend, "the invisible, huge job" that they did, "was making themselves American. The *best* citizens." The friend adds, "These are people who will never give up. . . . There was gratitude in them and idealism. That basic decency."

Another episode related in the book brings out these qualities and shows some contrast with Roth's own generation. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company had made his father the branch manager of the Maple Shade district in south New Jersey, but Roth believed that the company's record of hiring and promotion showed a general pattern of discrimination against Jews. He writes up his findings in a rather smug and supercilious let-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ter to Metropolitan's president, who had denied any such policy in letters to the *New York Times*. The difference between the elder and younger Roth, as seen in the following exchange between them, marks an important shift in attitudes between the first and second generations:

"They've been awfully good to me, the Metropolitan. You know how much pension I've received since I retired? I figured it out here just last week. Well over a quarter of a million dollars."

"That's peanuts. You're worth twice that."

"With an eighth-grade education? Am I?" He laughed. "I had nothing, absolutely nothing. Mother and I were flat broke and they hired me. It's a wonder what happened to a man like me."

"The hell it is. You worked. You sweated blood for them. You have a history and so do they. The difference is that you own up to yours, you say you were 'nothing,' but they don't like to admit to theirs, if those letters are any indication."

"They don't like the truth. What's so unusual about that? Do me a favor, will you? After this," he said, holding up my letter, "that's enough."

The discontent and ungracious indignation displayed by the younger Roth in this episode forms a link to our second set of writers, who are of the post-war generation, the generation whose feeling of entitlement has reconstituted our culture to the point where Abe Trillin's humility and Herman Roth's gratitude seem like quaint relics from a Victorian past. While Philip Roth's indignation is aimed at white Protestant America, that of these two younger writers is aimed at their own fathers, whom they regard less in a spirit of acceptance, appreciation, and reconciliation than in one of disappointment, disapproval, and disdain.

Mary Gordon's task in remembering her father's life is a difficult one in many respects. He died when she was seven and she has therefore only a limited store of distant memories. When she sets out to discover him, she finds that much of what her adored father told her and her mother about himself was not true. She is also an only child, and at the time of the writing of the book, her mother is in a nursing home and suffering from loss of memory. One feels for the daughter, but, nevertheless, one questions why she had to inflict this ugly, exasperating book on herself, on her readers, and on the memory of her long-dead father.

David Gordon told Mary's mother that he had been born an only child in Ohio in 1899, had gone to Harvard, and had hobnobbed with literati in Europe and America. He was actually born in Vilna in 1894, was named Israel (the Gordon is authentic), had three sisters, never finished high school or traveled abroad after he came to the United States, worked for the B&O Railroad, and had been married briefly before his union with Mary's mother. What was not in dispute was that he had become an extremely conservative Catholic in 1937; and that at different points he had written for the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, and *Harper's* and had edited several obscure publications—a girlie magazine before his conversion, a children's magazine and a religious journal, both short-lived, afterward.

At the start, David Gordon's story is similar to those of Abe Trillin and Herman Roth, but then it veers off in a different direction. During his employment at the B&O, he was listed as head of his household, which consisted of his mother, his three sisters, and himself (Gordon assumes her grandfather was dead at that point). He appears to have resisted the immigrant story of sacrifice and devotion to family, however, and to have left his mother and sisters behind. He eventually came east, converted, married an Italian/Irish-American woman, and had his beloved little girl. He was anything but the hardworking father who provides for a thriving family life, however. The mother was the financial mainstay of the household, while David Gordon, unable to hold a regular job, tried his hand at various editing, writing, and research projects until his death in 1957 of a heart attack.

The chief grievance Gordon has against her father lies less in his failure as a provider than in the occasional passages of anti-Semitism that she is shocked to find when she digs up his more obscure writing. In an admittedly difficult and painful way, she must confront her own Jewishness through her attachment to a man who repudiated the Jewishness he passed on to her. But she quickly wears out any sympathy the reader might have for her.

The Shadow Man is poorly written—little more than notes at times—with many lurches in direction and outbursts of grief and surprise and anxiety and horror, and many short, climactic paragraphs. Gordon gasps and writhes and agonizes her way through her ordeal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rather than giving us a portrait of controlled artistry. Her father's anti-Semitic remarks range from embarrassing to unkind to misguided to ignorant to arrogant to insensible, but one questions if his rather sad life doesn't deserve amnesty rather than this relentless scrutiny. Gordon herself asks: "Does the fact that he is, by every standard, a failure, relieve me of the responsibility of exposing him? And the fact that he is dead?" And the fact that "he did no damage" and wasn't even "a good enough writer"?

But, no, she pompously assigns herself "the responsibility of the witness." Practically every offending passage in her father's long-forgotten articles has to be recorded and grieved over, and Mary Gordon finds her own Jewishness as a victim, a victim of her own Jewish father's anti-Semitism. It is not, however, in personal, but in historical and moral terms that she indicts him:

> Because of him, I'm a Jew. What's at stake isn't my personal history. I am someone alive after the Holocaust. It's essential that we, those living now, name ourselves as people who know what went before. That we mark our understanding of the effects of hatred of Jews. That we say that the hatred is not forgivable, even if it emanates from one who is a Jew himself.

When we find out what he actually wrote, it comes as something of an anti-climax, and declamations such as the above come to seem overdramatic. Her father's references to Einstein as a "genius of a Jew-boy," his assertions of Catholic superiority over Jews in "their benighted quest for the Messiah," his belief that "the worst class" of Jews controlled Hollywood, his concern with the fate of the Church more than with the fate of the Jews under Nazism, may seem ignoble and ungenerous, but they don't merit all the consternation of this book. Mary Gordon starts to look like something of an ass, seeking more to parade her own moral superiority to her father than to rectify historical injustice or to bear witness.

Her needless indictment of her father is exacerbated by her own smugness and sense of beatitude. At one point she claims, "Although I have never known terrible physical suffering . . . I feel that I know something about the suffering of prisoners and slaves." The sad fate of the mother and sisters her father left behind makes Gordon "feel the responsibility to bear witness to the loss, the wreckage inflicted by the remorseless engine of boomtime America." Without discernible irony or self-reflectiveness, she tells us proudly, "When I was eighteen, I was losing my virginity, marching in demonstrations, participating in the takeover of university buildings, smoking pot, and sleeping anywhere in the name of justice and peace. I wasn't reading [books about religious Catholics] in 1967. I was reading *The Wretched of the Earth*."

Some of her remarks have us wondering just who is the self-hating Jew. When she discovers an old photo that shows her father with "a cute button-nosed flapper on the Zelda Fitzgerald model: a tawny blonde with a cloche hat," Gordon spots an anomaly: "Such an obvious Jew, sticking out of the otherwise perfect Jazz Age scene. His large nose, his darkness." Gordon's young daughter on the other hand is "an American. I have never felt really American, or assumed that my parents were. Americans were Protestant and we were not. She's at home here because I married her father, whose ancestors have been in the Appalachian mountains for two hundred years. . . . I married the American my father could never become." Later she sounds boastful when she describes her daughter as having "in her veins the blood of Union soldiers." If not a self-hating Jew, Mary Gordon is at least a snob. And what a contrast with the proudly earned American identity of the elder Trillin and Roth.

She reports some good things about her father, but they don't make up for the way she lays him bare, down to, for example, his toothlessness and penchant for "wet kisses." Ultimately she does not really make sense of his life. For one thing, she tries to explain his conversion without reference to the fact that he might actually have found something to believe in, however imperfectly. (At one point, she thinks of converting to Judaism herself, but a rabbi tells her that she is more needed as a righteous Gentile. One fantasizes a certain relief on his part, as if he were thinking, who needs another Jewish writer full of anger and unresolved grievance; let the Catholics keep this one.) After she has finished with her father, she starts in on her declining mother, and it is hard to believe that an acclaimed writer would want the world to know her parents in this way.

Paul Auster has at least the excuse of having been in his thirties when he wrote his memoir

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of his father, below the age of forty, at which "a moratorium has to be declared" on grievances against parents, according to a character in Saul Bellow's "The Theft." Nevertheless, the reader cannot help but be chilled by the cold, condescending scrutiny with which Auster makes what appears to have been a basically decent man into something of a freak.

The Invention of Solitude, which the *New York Times* unaccountably found "compassionate," is written with an air of portentous, ominous mystery. We do not so much as learn the first name of Auster's father until well into the book, and even then only incidentally. He was, we learn, "in the deepest, most unalterable sense," an "invisible man," less a "man occupying space" than "a block of impenetrable space in the form of a man," a man who "haunted" his own house, a "man without appetites," a "tourist of his own life." Oh, of course "he ate, he went to work, he had friends, he played tennis," but he was "devoid of passion, either for a thing, a person, or an idea," and was "incapable or unwilling to reveal himself."

After a while, the reader begins to see through this dehumanized portrayal and realizes that this man, Sam Auster, in fact did nothing outstandingly bad, was a faithful husband, a devoted father, a hard worker, a humane landlord, a patient son, a loyal brother, a generous uncle, and was, furthermore, liked, admired, and even loved by others. But he seems to have failed to live up to his son's idea of human perfection, and perhaps also that of his son's sixties generation. His fault appears to have been that he was distant, stoical, and reserved rather than passionate, involved, and engaged. Furthermore, he was too much invested in work and money and had no aesthetic sense.

In truth the poor man can do no right in his son's eyes. Auster faults his father's hard-work ethic but also the "good time Charlie" life he led before his marriage. (Perusing photos of his father in comic poses with bunches of women at various Catskills resorts, Auster comments disapprovingly: "He carried on like this until he was 34.") His father's chaste conduct during his courtship of Paul's mother seems lacking in another way: "No daring overtures, none of the aroused male's breathless assaults." A funny incident in which Sam Auster absentmindedly returned one day after work to lie down in the bedroom of the family's former house after it had been sold to another family is really, in his son's word, "pathetic," indicative of his father's robotic lack of humanity.

After eighteen years of marriage, Auster's parents were divorced, and his father continued to live in the big house they had shared as a family. Although his father kept it reasonably tidy, Auster recoils from the signs of neglect and deterioration he finds (as if that were so unusual for a divorced man living alone), which, he says, are a "metaphor" for his father's life. On the other hand, his father had bought a new house (also a new car) shortly before his sudden death of heart failure, but then the fact that the old house shows no sign of having been prepared for the move is another example of his queer disengagement from life. His clothes were drab and colorless during his marriage, but when he tried to spruce up after his divorce, he looks like "a small boy who had been dressed up by his parents." His heartbreaking devotion to his mentally ill daughter only reveals his "helplessness" and "despair," the ineffectiveness underlying his whole life, according to his son.

Although Auster claims that his father saw him only "through the mists of his solitude," as "one more shadow . . . among all the shadows that flitted past him," it does appear that his father was kind to him, took him places, told him stories, softened his failures, was patient with his mistakes, cared for him when he was in need. But Sam Auster gets no credit for any of this. He was estranged from "the domain of the other," his son tells us portentously. The father's consoling words after young Paul's poor showing in a baseball game were delivered "automatically," "without feeling." Time spent with his father often brings the young Auster only anguish and humiliation. On trips to Jewish restaurants, the small boy grows queasy at the food. When Paul goes with his father to collect rents, the mostly poor tenants are happy to greet "Mr. Sam's son," but Paul remembers the smell of poverty and the whole experience like "a splinter in the thumb." His father used to bring clothes to his needy tenants, and once when Paul spotted one of his old T-shirts on a child, he "was overcome with a feeling of shame."

The father could not understand his son's desire for a literary life—"His most common

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

description of me was that I had 'my head in the clouds'"—but at one point the father does go to the library to read his son's poems. Instead of feeling gratitude for his father's effort, the son describes the library visit as a scene out of Edward Hopper: "I imagined him in a large deserted room, early in the morning before going to work; sitting at one of those long tables with his overcoat still on, hunched over words that must have been incomprehensible to him."

Like Mary Gordon, Paul Auster has to reveal the intimate and embarrassing details, from the condoms and hair coloring he finds in the house after his father's death to the petty economies and dishonesties to which his father was sometimes prone, even while he makes a show of worrying that he has no right to invade his father's privacy. Auster does deliver some good and endearing details as well, but, like Gordon, makes no effort to integrate them into a whole. His narrative is also studded with the short, climactic paragraphs that are meant to show the process of discovery but actually reveal a want of artistry. And, as if he were already preparing to be the post-modern novelist he eventually became, author of such works of quirky nihilism as *The City of Glass* and *Mr. Vertigo*, Auster declares: "At times I have the feeling that I am writing about three or four different men. . . . Fragments." This is followed by the single-word paragraph, "Yes." But, really, the reply should be "No"; he is writing about one man with different sides, and he must take him for all in all.

Auster's mother's discontent with his father helped shape his picture of his father. She "realized her mistake" before the honeymoon was over and the author rather melodramatically imagines his own conception in "a passionless embrace, a blind, dutiful groping between chilly hotel sheets" in Niagara Falls. (Does he imagine it, or was he given an account of the scene?) His fragile, sensitive little sister asks her mother, "Do you love daddy?" at least once a day. Auster admits that he was his mother's child, and, reading between the lines, we surmise that Sam Auster may have had to make the best of a bad bargain.

Moreover, the past contains a dark secret, which Auster unfolds with putative reluctance: His father's mother shot her husband, Sam's father, to death during an argument after he had left her for another woman. She was acquitted because of his infidelity and the five small children who remained. The grown children never talked of this, the secret came to light by coincidence. A load of clippings involving the scandal that had rocked Kenosha, Wisconsin, in 1919 (another, less happy tale of Midwestern immigrant Jews) came into Auster's possession some years before. He professes to be horrified to see all this sordid family history in print, but then proceeds to relate it headline by headline, article by article. Even as he does so, he allows no illumination to come from it, except by inference.

Likewise with the impoverished childhood that Sam Auster and his siblings spent with their fiercely devoted and tyrannical mother, about which Sam spoke little: They moved from place to place, school to school, sometimes dodging creditors, with nothing but one another to rely upon. "It was almost like living in quarantine," Auster comments rather clinically. Auster tells of all this without much compassion or feeling and only barely makes the connection between these childhood experiences and his father's character—the distance, the evasiveness, the compulsive need to work and have money, the fear of too much spending, the practical recoil from the aesthetic dimension of life. His father's relationship to his brothers—his business partners in what Auster admits was the nearly superhuman task of managing buildings in Newark, New Jersey—is regarded critically, as showing a want of individuality: "I look at them not as four separate individuals but as a clan, a quadruplicate image of solidarity," Auster writes. The fact that his father saw his brothers nearly every day and would never speak a word against them is seen as peculiar rather than praiseworthy, and their collective once-a-week visit to their mother is a scene out of a comic strip—a fierce, tiny woman—a "Jewish Mammy Yokum" who spoke little English, as she was earlier described—surrounded by four tall grown men.

The capacity for sympathetic evocation of the European immigrant story that gave so many lives their meaning and coherence in this century is growing thinner and thinner. His father's family's admirable conquest of daunting obstacles—obstacles that would have sunk others—does not impress the son. Auster the poet refuses to see the poetry in his father's life. A story his father told to convey the importance of family before self, about his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mother taking his hard-earned childhood dollars from his piggybank in order to meet some household expense, strikes Paul not as admirable but as blameworthy.

The immigrant idyll brought to life by Trillin and Roth is now regarded without sympathetic identification or attempt at understanding, but with distance and criticism, the selflessness and survivorship behind it made to look dry, thin, diminished, like old newspaper clippings. The old-fashioned masculine stoicism before life's mysteries and vicissitudes is judged and repudiated by the talkative, analytical, self-regarding children of the Age of Aquarius who had the luxury to allow themselves so much more.

Trillin's ideal *Life with Father* kind of experience contrasts with Roth's more combative experience with his father, but these older writers strive to see their fathers with both objectivity and sympathy and in their own context rather than, as with the two younger writers, through the lens of their own feelings and their own time. The fathers of Trillin and Roth have their faults and unfashionable habits (Abe Trillin's investment of future hopes in his son, not in his daughter; Herman Roth's relentless criticism of his lady friend), but these two writers do not bring them down in order to appease current orthodoxies. They are grateful for what their fathers were, rather than disappointed with them for what they were not.

While the two younger writers please themselves by cruelly and unnecessarily offering their fathers' lives up to the examination of the world, the two older writers give us a glimpse of something fine that we have lost. Roth and Trillin shore up the memory of what fatherhood once meant, before it is entirely destroyed by the anti-male culture of feeling prevalent today. The world of the fathers was built not on power, as the feminists would have it, but on sacrifice, or, perhaps more accurately, on the power that derived from that sacrifice, and from the love that like a gentle shadow lay behind it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Quest of Graham Hough

PETER SCHWENDENER

There are writers one strongly suspects that are not "great" but of whose works one cannot get enough. I'm not thinking of so-called guilty pleasures, such as those of the classics scholar who reads Anne Rice novels or the theologian who loves comic books, but of writers for whom one feels an affinity that resists explanation. The English writer Stephen Potter, along with his Lifemanship books, for example, wrote a series of more or less unclassifiable books, including a psychological study of Coleridge and a study of literary education entitled *The Muse in Chains*, both unbelievably good (and funny), but I have never been able to arrive at an objective account of why I like these books so much. The same goes for at least two literary critics I stumbled upon when I was in graduate school: Ronald Peacock, whose books on German writers such as Hölderlin and Goethe I found myself devouring even though I can't read German, and Graham Hough, who of all the writers I have so far named is probably the least obscure, at least in England.

Graham Hough's name (which is pronounced "huff") pops up, for example, in Frank Kermode's recent memoir, *Not Entitled*, where he appears to Kermode in, of all things, a dream:

> This very morning I woke out of a dream of disgrace: I had been giving a series of readings of something I'd written, aware that it was not good, though the audience, seated round at a long table, seemed patient. Then the late Graham Hough, a friend but an unsparing critic, began to chatter rudely to his neighbor. . . . And it seemed that he had two good reasons for being rude to me. The first was that he had spent more than three years in a Japanese prison camp and I hadn't. The second was that I stayed away from his funeral.

Those who study the works of Yeats are apt to encounter Hough fairly often, for he dealt at some length with Yeats in his first book, *The Last Romantics* (1949), and later wrote *The Mystery Religion of W. B. Yeats* (1984), which must be the sanest work ever devoted to that topic. Those who study "modernism" may be familiar with his 1960 book *Image and Experience*, which includes a long, intellectually dense and frequently very funny chapter on the literary influence of Pound, Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and the other canonical modernists. Finally, students of D. H. Lawrence and Spenser still have to tread lightly around the books he devoted to those two writers.

Graham Hough, whose full name was Graham Goulder Hough, was born in 1908 in Lancashire, England, and died in 1990 in Cambridge, where he was Professor of English. His obituary in the London *Times* describes him as a "scholar and poet," a designation that does rough justice to the volume of poetry he published in 1961, *Legends and Pastorals*, and to a number of other poems that should, in my opinion, be collected.

The obituary, which I dug out of the library recently, matches my own impression of Hough, derived only from reading his books, almost perfectly. He thought, according to the *Times*, "that dons took themselves too seriously and were too pompous about their supposed responsibilities to society at large." He seems to have been addicted to clear thought, and regularly went to great lengths to make sure people said what they meant; as the *Times* puts it, "His explosions of what seemed like bad temper, in private relations as well as on pub-

✪ PETER SCHWENDENER is a former staff writer for the *Chicago Reader*. He has also written for *TriQuarterly* magazine and the *Chicago Tribune*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lic occasions, were as often as not deliberately designed (effectively too) so as to jerk discussion out of hums and haws and judicious qualifications into a clear judgment for or against."

At the same time, the obituarist accurately discerns that "Hough's taste in literature had a soft center"—namely, a poetic one: "The English lyric of the last 200 years was what he had held on to as a talisman through his years in Japanese prison camps; and it was what he campaigned for through 40 years after his war was over." From what I have been able to deduce from scattered references to it in his books and the comments of a few other people, Hough's imprisonment by the Japanese was the defining event of his life. I first learned of it while reading the chapter entitled "Wordsworth and Coleridge" in his book *The Romantic Poets*, where he relates it to a point he is trying to make about the unevenness of Wordsworth's achievement:

> I once knew a man in a prison camp who divided his copy of Wordsworth's poems into two halves, retained the first, and swapped the second for the bottom half of a pair of pyjamas. He rightly judged that the intellectual loss was very slight.

As far as I know, he never wrote at length about prison-camp experience, though it pops up here and there in his book reviews, such as one he did of a volume of wartime drawings by the artist Ronald Searle in the May 8, 1986, issue of the *London Review of Books*. He there remarks:

> Life as a prisoner of war is an indeterminate sentence, and for that reason nothing you say about it afterwards can ever be quite true. . . . While it is going on, no one knows whether it is ever going to end, and the absent ending colors every moment of every day. Once it has ended, if you are still alive, you know it was always going to.

He mentions one of his captors, a Japanese officer who "had learnt that I was a professor of literature in private life and wanted to talk about Symbolist poetry. . . . Symbolist to the last, he decided to leave living to others: we heard later that he had committed hara-kiri."

Hough's career as a scholar began with the study of Symbolist poetry and its English permutations but did not end there. If his work has an overarching theme, it is the painful shift—I think painful is the right word—from the Victorian to the modern era. His first book is called *The Last Romantics* in deference to a phrase of Yeats's, but Hough is not really an elegiac critic such as his contemporary F. R. Leavis, looking back with longing on something putatively more "organic" than present society. His sense of the otherness of works of art, their failure, as he puts it, to "reflect very accurately the convulsions of the social order," puts him at odds with orthodox Marxism, yet a curiously strong sense of social actuality, bordering often on satire, is present even when he is discussing hermetic topics such as the mystery religion of W. B. Yeats.

The obituary in the *Times* mentions that Hough's persona as a critic was modeled in many ways on that of William Empson, author of *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and a famous Cambridge personality. When Empson died in 1984, Hough wrote a moving, though far from sentimental, essay on his life and work for the *London Review of Books*.

His portrait of Empson has an oblique quality that seems to echo its subject's own mental habits:

> It is said by those who frequented Bloomsbury in its palmy days that its denizens had a way of making people feel uncomfortable by employing an allusive private dialect which others could hardly be expected to understand and were tacitly rejected for not understanding. Empson's conversation had something of this disconcerting quality—except that he was a one-man Bloomsbury, the dialect was peculiar to himself.

The essay does not remain tethered to Empson's personality, though that is interesting enough, but seeks to place his work in a larger context. One passage goes a long way toward describing the kind of literary critic I believe Hough himself to be:

> He comes from a time when English literature still had readers, not merely students, and his books deal with the accepted canon. . . . His own style is extremely direct, ranging from the succinctly literary to the frankly colloquial; and he felt no need to spice it up with bits from Heidegger or the Cercle Linguistique de Prague.

Hough was married twice, in 1942 to Rosamund Oswell, by whom he had one son and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one daughter, and in 1952 to Ingeborg Neumann. Both marriages, according to the *Times*, were dissolved. The only work of fiction by Hough I have found, a short story entitled "A Weekend in the Country" from a 1948 issue of *The New Statesman and Nation*, is about a troubled marriage. In the story, which is told without dialogue, a couple pays a visit to the house of the wife's grandmother, who has just died. The grandmother was "maddish," the house "tumble-down," and when they get there, presumably to clean the place up, they find, among other things, "family photographs, album after album, old straw-hatted groups, women in bustles, a dead world incapable of resurrection." The story has much the same atmosphere as the chapter on Pre-Raphaelitism in Hough's first book. The past, embodied by the house, hangs heavily over the couple (many of Hough's poems also fixate on houses and their ambiguous qualities). The story is about a past that hangs on even though it is paradoxically "incapable of resurrection."

Something like this, transposed into another key, is a recurring idea in Hough's criticism. In the early sixties the *Times Literary Supplement* asked a number of prominent critics to air their views on that perennial topic, the function of criticism. Hough weighed in with "The Function of the Imagination," which opens with the rather deflating comment, "No one has ever put up a statue to a literary critic, as Mr. R. P. Blackmur once ruefully remarked to me; and I do not suppose that anyone has ever set out to become one. Like keeping the streets clean, it is a respectable trade, but one that people drift into rather than choose." From this low note, Hough goes on to discuss what perhaps only an English critic would have the nerve publicly to call "our imaginative life." Our imaginative life, he argues, is shaped by the past whether we happen to like the past or not. However we feel about the past, we are better off understanding it, just as "it is vital to know and understand our parents—because they are our parents, not because they were always right."

The issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* in which this essay appears carries the only photograph of Hough I have seen. Viewed through the obscuring lens of the library microfilm, he looks vaguely like his hero W. B. Yeats, heavy-featured and serious, not unlike a poet, but also (unlike Yeats, it seems to me) not very happy about being photographed. Another thing he does not seem happy about (though his academic career was, as his obituary says, "distinguished") is being a professor. He taught on three continents: in Asia before and after World War II; in America, where he held visiting professorships at Johns Hopkins and Cornell in the fifties; and at Cambridge, where he settled in the sixties. Reviewing the works of Auden and Louis MacNiece for the *Critical Quarterly* in the sixties, he wrote, "Any English bourgeois literary intellectual, born in the first decade of this century, moderately well read, moderately travelled, moderately academic and not too happy about it—anyone like this, even without their talent, has shared too much their experience ever to see their poetry from the outside."

So much for the bare outlines of Graham Hough's career. I still find it hard to account for the effect his work had on me when I first came across it. After reading and rereading him for a while, I tentatively conclude that it has to do with more than literature, though he is at least as literary as William Empson and also, like Empson, something of a mandarin, even though he writes well ("in his prose style," says the obituary, "which is rapid, witty and clear . . . he certainly surpassed his model, Empson"). When I came across *Paradise Lost* as an undergraduate I was immediately conscious of something that went far beyond literature, having equal roots in a certain way of believing, thinking, and acting that was once the heritage, if not the calm, undisputed heritage, of a sizable number of people. With *Ulysses* and most modern works, on the other hand, I was aware of literature and nothing else. Correspondingly, most of the modern critics I have read are brilliant when it comes to literature and dull when it comes to anything else. The attraction, to me, of Graham Hough is that he isn't like this.

I fell under the spell of Graham Hough's writing as a fairly miserable graduate student, and found myself rifling through back issues of the *Critical Quarterly*, *Encounter*, the *Spectator*, *Horizon*, and other British periodicals in quest of his reviews, essays, and poems. The intellectual atmosphere of these periodicals, academic and otherwise, starts to change around, say, 1963. Before that year everything in them,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not just Hough's writing but the ads for life insurance, brandy, and cigarettes surrounding it, is roughly continuous with the Victorian era. By 1969 the leisurely, book-tasting atmosphere, combined with the knack for being serious without pomposity, has given way entirely to a more hectoring (please forgive me) American tone. A certain dyspepsia starts to creep into Hough's references to America and the twentieth century. He does not, however, belong with the English poets and critics of the fifties who despised modernism because they found it anti-English or "cosmopolitan." The fact that his entry in the British *Who Was Who* lists his avocation as "Travel" pretty much alienates him from their company.

As a critic, Hough deals with a considerable, even a daunting, variety of writers, and he does not seem to have read anything idly or casually. I have a piece by him on George Eliot from *Horizon* (the only one he did for that magazine)—long, philosophically dense evaluations of T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and Coleridge, a critique of C. S. Lewis from a 1955 issue of the *Twentieth Century*, a review of a Ruskin anthology from the first issue of the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, a piece on the French Miltonist Denis Saurat from a short-lived journal called *Chance*, and a highly polemical, even angry response from an early issue of the *Hopkins Review* to a New Critical reading of "Tears, Idle Tears" ("This Tennysonian lyric has been skillfully dissected by Mr. Cleanth Brooks, and its *disjecta membra* added to the rich stock of paradoxes, ironies, and ambiguities boiled up so merrily together in *The Well-Wrought Urn*. What follows is an attempt to put the poem together again").

I recall emerging from the Stanford library, happily covered with the dust of one or more of these periodicals, and seeing a poster in the English Department calling for "papers to be read at an upcoming conference on the 1970s," the call accompanied by a drawing of John Travolta. The world of Graham Hough was not the one I was in, though there were a few connections. Hough was an admirer of the late Yvor Winters, the ferociously tough poet-critic who was ensconced at Stanford for several decades. Winters is singled out in Hough's book *Image and Experience* as the "honorable exception" to the tendency of twentieth-century critics to cower blindly before the modernist edicts of Pound, Eliot, and the rest (there is admittedly something vaguely obsessive in Hough's dislike of modernism, as if it were a dog he couldn't stop kicking). I should say that Hough, like many others, was a qualified admirer of Winters in that he had an understandably hard time accepting the Wintersian view that the poems of N. Scott Momaday and Adelaide Crapsey are better than those of Shakespeare, Donne, and Keats.

I am not caricaturing Winters: see his book *Forms of Discovery*, which Hough reviewed in the *New Statesman* of January 5, 1968. He there describes Winters, after a fair-minded account of his views (he admires, as I do, some of Winters's poetry) as "another American casualty—a man of genuine but narrow talent brought up in such a parody of a civilization that the only course open to him is to turn into a cross-grained local wiseacre." These are perhaps the harshest words on America Hough ever permitted himself, at least in print. Usually his opinion of America is phrased in more literary terms, as when he decries, in a 1970 essay, "the dreary baggage of the academic American-literature industry and its inflated valuations; the automatic mid-Atlantic gabble that obscures all real differences, all judgments, all clarity of view." There is an anti-American streak in Hough, but it is not a mile wide: it is about fifty yards wide and seems related to unavoidable dealings with certain sectors of the American professoriate; it also co-exists with a near-idolatrous estimate of John Crowe Ransom and, to a slightly lesser extent, Robert Frost.

Hough's journalism and scholarship have the same serio-comic tone, and the tone does not vary much over time. A short note on "Some Coleridge Marginalia" from a 1951 issue of *Modern Language Notes* is recognizably by the reviewer who writes, in 1981, "Critical reactions to Muriel Spark puzzle me a good deal. The general consensus among reviewers seems to find her riotously funny; and in the midst of this open-hearted merriment I am a skeleton at the feast. Or rather, I can't find the feast. . . ." The tone, even in publications such as *Modern Language Notes*, is that of someone addressing "readers, not merely students." The short article on Coleridge, for example, examines the marginalia in Coleridge's copy of Hone's New Testament Apocrypha, a popular compilation of non-canonical religious works published in 1820. It has the look of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dry scholarly note but hints at the subject of Coleridge's troubled relationship to religious belief. It is obviously groundwork for Hough's books on D. H. Lawrence and Yeats, both of which take an unembarrassed plunge into the almost impossibly difficult question of religion and poetry. The question is hardly resolved, though Hough is one of the only modern critics I have read who can use the word *spiritual* without sounding crazy or dishonest.

I have not been able to deduce a coherent body of doctrine from Hough's work, though he was not uninterested in literary theory. One of his more controversial books was his 1966 *Essay on Criticism*, which is laid out in numbered paragraphs, rather like a philosophical treatise. Topics include such standbys as "Symbolism," "Interpretation," and, perhaps most important, "Theory of Kinds," of which he writes:

> Criticism before the Romantic period was in large part based on the theory of literary kinds—the division of literature into separate genres, each with its own province, its appropriate structure and rhetoric. Since the Romantic period this has been largely neglected, but it was a valuable element in the older criticism and we still need it.

By theory of kinds he means not an elaborate classification but a fairly rudimentary form of literary awareness, something close to the distinctions everyone makes in practice between a short poem, a novel, and a play. Whether or not the idea possesses timeless validity, it is largely taken for granted by Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, Northrop Frye, and M. H. Abrams.

Of "theory" in the newer sense he did not, to the dismay of some of his colleagues, have a very exalted opinion. Frank Kermode, in particular, wondered in 1981 how "a mind so civil, so elegant, as Hough's" could object to some of the arguments set forth in David Lodge's book *Working with Structuralism*. Hough once explained the proliferation of "theory" in English departments as, among other things, a response to the prestige of the physical sciences:

> Not long ago Sir Peter Medawar remarked that when the momentous DNA discoveries were being made there were plenty of people in the English faculties of universities quite as clever as Crick and Watson—but Crick and Watson had something to be clever about.

This drew fire, or something less impressive, from Professor Terence Hawkes, who in a letter to the *London Review of Books* (where the above remarks appeared) invited Hough to "piss off." In an interview a few years later, Frank Kermode permitted himself the lightly veiled reference "There's always this feeling that you get among certain sorts of English critics that all this French nonsense is something which you can blow over with one good 'huff.'"

Anyone who thinks Hough a theoretical Luddite should see his discussion of symbol and allegory in the sixth chapter of his book on Spenser; it makes Paul de Man's excursus on the same topic look merely ingenious (they should also see his essay on authorial intention, "An Eighth Type of Ambiguity," in his 1978 book *Selected Essays*). I suspect that his early immersion in Symbolist doctrine, combined with his war experience, inoculated him against "theory" as the quasi-religious way of life it has become for many learned persons. His persona as a public figure was substantially that of a prisoner, as Kermode's earlier remarks suggest and as a letter to the *Times* demonstrated a few days after that newspaper ran his obituary. The letter, from a man named John Sharp, reads in part:

> Your obituary notice of Professor Graham Hough (September 11) mentions his imprisonment in Japanese hands. During that time he had with him a copy of Yeats's poems, which stimulated his interest in the source of their inspiration. This he traced back through Pater to Ruskin, and the discovery led to his book *The Last Romantics*. . . . As a fellow prisoner on the Burma-Siam Railway, I made his acquaintance at a camp where he was supervising scabies treatment in a sulphurous spring near the River Huai Noi.

It is astute of Sharp to notice the balance Hough achieves in *The Last Romantics* between verbal artifacts—"Yeats's poems"—and the less easily inspectable "source of their inspiration."

The belief that "dons took themselves too seriously" also seems to date from the war. In a 1983 review (generally admiring) of John Lucas's book *Romantic to Modern Literature*, he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

writes, "Nothing that happens in English departments of universities merits the name of crisis." A sense of tact, or proportion, animates that remark, as it does a reference to the Holocaust in his review of Ronald Searle's wartime drawings:

> When we got out, we saw the photographs in illustrated papers of Belsen and Buchenwald. Not all of it was unfamiliar. . . . But in respect of the sheer scale of the catastrophe, and its hideous deliberation, it was plain at once that we had known nothing like it.

Hough's polemical "explosions," as the obituary calls them, are rarely merely polemical but have a kind of historical weightiness that edges them away from the merely personal. He writes of a novel by Bill Hopkins, *The Divine and the Decay*, "The fact that this performance has been treated in some quarters with a moderate respect shows that there is a dangerous vacuum in our present culture that could easily be filled with highly unpleasant material."

There is a vein of cultural pessimism, a sense that, as Hough puts it in one of his essays, "we live in a bad time." One response to the world, if one feels this way, is to turn literature or poetry into a kind of refuge, and Hough interestingly refused this option. He admired Wallace Stevens (as a long essay on Stevens from the *Critical Quarterly* shows) but only for his poetry; the aestheticism of Stevens's essays, according to which the world is made bearable only by poems, left him cold. There are, I believe, two kinds of critics, those who treat poetry as a kind of religion and those who love it but remain skeptical about its ultimate value, and Hough seems to belong to the latter class. He could never write, as Frank Kermode does in *Not Entitled*, "From poetry and music I derive the little I know about holiness." His view appears in a 1953 review for the *Listener* of *Missa Sine Nomine*, a novel by Ernst Weichert about Germany after the war: "It is probable that literature has always made less difference to the world than *litterateurs* would like to think."

"The sea is always calm ten fathoms down" is a line from one of William Empson's poems (quoted by Hough in his tribute to Empson), and it is not a bad image of the persona Hough projects in his writing. The surface of his prose is agitated by the sense that "we live in a bad time," but this is countered by the sense that we don't only live in the present. Poetry may not be able to induce a sense of holiness, but it can "knock a window in the subtopian fall-out shelter to which contemporary politics and economics seem bent on condemning us," as he writes in *The Dream and the Task*, a short book that originated as a series of BBC talks in 1962. It is not as famous as *The Last Romantics* or *Image and Experience*, but I am of the opinion that it is Graham Hough's best book. It deals with one of the most boring topics in the world, that of cultural crisis, but manages to infuse it with a tone of quiet, intimate concern. It isolates, for me at least, the peculiar quality of twentieth-century life. The argument is carefully limited and advanced in a non-prophetic, even an anti-prophetic, tone of voice:

> I am not conjuring up the ghost of an imagined age of faith. I am not even suggesting that Europe was ever wholly Christian, for I do not believe it was. As far as the personal life is concerned I mean that until some time in the nineteenth century a paradigm, a pattern was laid down for the relation of the human person with his fellows—his relations as a child, as a parent, as a husband or wife, as a neighbor. However imperfectly it was followed, it was known and accepted. . . . [I]n the nearer and more domestic areas a whole body of images and stories, histories or myths, familiarized and humanized the metaphysical immensities. It is in these areas that we are conscious of an absence.

In 1967, Hough wrote a review for the *Listener* of Frank Kermode's *Sense of an Ending*, whose argument runs counter, in many ways, to that of his own work. To Kermode, the "paradigms" that shape our lives are, and always have been, exclusively literary. Specifically, our ideas about literary form—about, for example, what constitutes a good ending to a novel or poem—are incapable of being detached from our various senses of how the world will someday end. Hough finds this arresting, as I think most people would, but is troubled by the degree of aestheticism this idea seems to sanction. Kermode believes that social sanity depends on drawing a firm line between the "fictions" we meet with in literature and the "myths" that we allow to guide

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

our conduct. The overt fascism of Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound is a result, according to Kermode, of their failure to keep fiction and myth in separate, airtight compartments. The argument is becoming a bit too "literary" for its subject matter, and Hough politely says so:

> Now I do not believe that the political attitudes of these men were due to errors in their theory of literary criticism. They made wrong political choices. They shut their eyes to things that anyone could see. . . . And the moral to be drawn is not that we should attempt some impossible isolation of imaginative fiction from the world of social practice, but that when imaginative fiction makes its appearance there, as it will, it must be subjected to judgment and criticism of another kind.

Hough eventually comes around to admiring the book, whose oracular evasiveness "fortunately" does not totally obscure "the seriousness and importance" of what Kermode has to say. But the point he is intent on making is one that crops up elsewhere in his work and is hard to make without sounding merely paradoxical. Graham Hough believes in the strangeness of the past but also in the possibility of understanding it in a non-reductive way, as a sane person comes to understand his personal past; he also believes that, though "imaginative fiction" and "social practice" are differing parts of the same thing, it is not edifying to equate good literary criticism with right moral choices. I have an uneasy feeling that I may be doing less than full justice to Graham Hough's thought, which at its best is a mixture, like that of his admired William Empson, though less tortuously phrased, of delicate discriminations and inspired common sense.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REAPPRAISAL

The Prosaic Willa Cather

James Seaton

In Willa Cather's fiction, friendship nourishes and protects while romantic love leads to disillusion or death. Jim Burden of *My Ántonia* cares for Ántonia Shimerda all his life because when he was young he dreamed about Lena Lingard, not Ántonia. Ántonia's own marriage to Anton Cuzak is secure, because the two are not romantic lovers but live together on "terms of easy friendliness, touched with humour." When Niel Herbert in *A Lost Lady* discovers that Marian Forrester has slept with Frank Ellinger while her husband is far away in Denver, he loses "one of the most beautiful things in his life," a romantic vision that constituted "an aesthetic ideal." Myra Henshawe's elopement seems the height of romance, but the question she whispers on her deathbed as her husband sits nearby pronounces "a terrible judgment" on their love: "Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy?" Emil Bergson and Marie Tovesky Shabata become lovers in *0 Pioneers!* and are shot a few hours later by Frank Shabata when he finds them together under the white mulberry tree. Emil's older sister, Alexandra Bergson, tells Frank in prison that "I think they were more to blame than you." She has no "fears" about her own marriage to Carl Linstrum, because it is based on friendship rather than love. She tells Carl, "I think when friends marry, they are safe. We don't suffer like—those young ones."

Willa Cather endows such fictional characters as Marie Shabata, Marian Forrester, and Myra Henshawe with qualities that earn the reader's respect, despite their author's implicit questioning of the mystique of romantic love. In her criticism Cather could be less generous. In her review of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, she had little sympathy for those "clamoring" women who demand "more romance out of life than God put in it." It was obvious to Cather that "the passion of love" is an "individual and self-limited passion" that should not be expected to "fill and gratify every need of life." Those susceptible to the illusions of romantic love seemed to her less notable for the strength of their emotions than for the weakness of their "faculty of observation, comparison, reasoning about things." She considered the vicissitudes of sexual passion a "trite" and "sordid" theme, which a writer as talented as Kate Chopin would do well to avoid in favor of "a better cause."

One school of contemporary criticism finds in her putative lesbianism a sufficient explanation for Cather's refusal to place romantic love between men and women at the center of her fiction or her view of life. Willa Cather's sexual orientation, indeed, is sometimes held to provide the key to understanding her entire oeuvre, not merely those stories that deal with sexual themes. There are some obvious advantages to this approach. At least Willa Cather is now being read and discussed. Once, before the rise of feminist criticism, Willa Cather seemed in danger of being classified as a more talented Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a Laura Ingalls Wilder for adults, at best a white Jesse Fauset, certainly not a major writer in the same league with an Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway himself had dismissed Cather's World War I novel *One of Ours* as hopelessly inauthentic, transparently derived from a movie rather than experience. Of course it wasn't Cather's fault that she hadn't seen combat. The modernist Zeitgeist nevertheless posed certain questions that did not

✪ JAMES SEATON is a Professor of English at Michigan State University and the author of *Cultural Conservatism, Political Liberalism: From Criticism to Cultural Studies.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have to be asked explicitly to reduce her literary standing.

Hadn't Cather revealed her fundamental attachment to genteel culture when, like Edith Wharton and Henry James, she accepted the nobility of the Allied cause in World War I? Wasn't Cather part of that genteel culture that was overthrown by Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, H. L. Mencken, and the other rebels of the twenties? And wasn't Cather's unswervingly positive treatment of the agents of European colonization, whether it was farmers in Nebraska, the Catholic Church in the Southwest, or the French settlers in seventeenth-century Quebec, additional proof of her acceptance of traditional values? Wasn't alienation from family life, from tradition, from religion, from one's country the mark of the authentic masterpieces of the twentieth century?

The assumptions behind such unstated questions discouraged interest in Cather more surely than explicit attacks. Today it may be shrewd tactics for defenders of Cather to keep emphasizing that Willa Cather was a woman and even shrewder to stress, over and over again, what Cather herself never declared, that she was a lesbian. In the long run, however, playing the gender and sexual orientation cards will probably not do much more for Cather's reputation than would an attempt to historicize and excuse her as a product of Victorian genteel culture.

Joan Acocella concludes her devastating essay, in *The New Yorker* (November 25, 1995) of recent Cather criticism with the suggestion that we would all be better off if people just stopped writing about Cather altogether, and, given the excesses cited in her essay, she has a point. There should be, however, room for some alternatives between nonsense and silence. If Willa Cather is to be taken seriously, as she deserves—that is, as a major writer and cultural critic—then the search for the origins of her opinions must give way to a renewed attempt to understand the significance of the view of the world achieved when those opinions became transmuted into novels, short stories, and essays. Perhaps it is time to look for another way to understand Willa Cather's criticism of romantic love as well as her affirmation of organized religion and ordinary family life.

Gary Saul Morson, in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, has coined the term *prosaics* to refer to "a way of thinking about human events that focuses on the ordinary, messy, quotidian facts of daily life." Morson explains that "prosaics questions whether the most important events may not be the most ordinary and everyday ones—events that we do not appreciate simply because they are so commonplace." He notes that "prosaic thinkers . . . are especially hostile to the ideology of romantic love, which regards ordinary marriage as uninteresting and great passion as real life." Morson offers Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope, and Leo Tolstoy as three exemplary prosaic novelists. He does not mention any American novelists, perhaps because many of the most famous American writers have written "romances" in which everyday life figures as the enemy of authentic existence. From Cooper's Leather-Stocking Tales and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* down to Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Richard Wright's *Native Son,* much American fiction depicts life within a family, within society, as mere existence, as spiritual death.

American literature often celebrates the spiritual exultation of individuals but rarely depicts organized religion as anything more than institutionalized hypocrisy. Arthur Dimmesdale and Elmer Gantry remain the representative ministers of the American novel. Outside the novel, the verdict is the same. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and William James celebrate spirituality but have little good to say about organized religion. Allen Ginsberg is typical, not exceptional, in turning to a spirituality that opposes rather than consecrates the everyday obligations and rewards of work and family.

In Willa Cather's fiction, spirituality that seems to offer an alternative to everyday reality appears occasionally but usually disastrously. In *Shadows on the Rock,* Jeanne Le Ber, the only daughter of "the richest merchant of Montreal," takes a vow to live alone in a cell behind the altar of a chapel. The cell is built so that she can hear the mass and speak to a confessor without ever seeing another person. She becomes known "as la recluse de Ville-Marie," whose isolation is broken only by a visit from angels who repair her spinning wheel. The sincerity of her vocation is unquestionable and the story of the miracle of the spinning wheel provides "an incomparable gift" for families otherwise telling only "tales of Indian massacres and lost hunters." For society, then, the recluse's project brings divi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dends. But Willa Cather allows the reader to gauge the spiritual effect on Jeanne Le Ber herself. Her former playmate Pierre Charron, determined to learn whether Jeanne Le Ber is content, hides in the chapel at midnight and watches her come alone to the altar. He does not speak to her, but he hears her pray, in a voice "so changed,—hoarse, hollow, with the sound of despair in it." Once Pierre hears "a groan, such as I have never heard; such despair—such resignation and despair!"

In *O Pioneers!* it is not sexuality but a spirituality that defies human nature that seems to encourage the more dangerous romantic illusions. Emil Bergson and Marie Shabata become illicit lovers only after they convince themselves that they can move beyond ordinary human nature. Resigning herself to Emil's departure, Marie feels herself uplifted, ready to "live a new life of perfect love." Emil Bergson, as he attends the funeral mass of his friend Amedée Chevalier, hears in the music of "Ave Maria" the possibility of "a kind of rapture in which he could love forever without faltering and without sin." The two meet under the white mulberry tree and fall asleep, having finally become illicit lovers while searching for "perfect love" and "rapture . . . without sin." Frank Shabata finds the two sleeping in the orchard and shoots them with his "murderous 405 Winchester," which he was carrying to gratify his own romantic need "to feel like a desperate man."

In contrast to such romantic spirituality, organized religion figures throughout Cather's fiction as a rock anchoring the changing aspirations and hopes of individuals to a larger order. Cather connected religion with her favorite objective correlative, the rock, in her narratives of both Quebec and the American Southwest. Father Latour surely expresses Willa Cather's own ideas in his musing when he first sees the "Enchanted Mesa," the "rock of Àcoma":

> The rock, when one came to think of it, was the utmost expression of human need; even mere feeling yearned for it; it was the highest comparison of loyalty in love and friendship.

The pueblos and mesas of the Southwest recur in Cather's writings, offering mute testimony to the way in which religion can provide a basis for everyday life. In Cather's novel of seventeenth-century French Canada, the "rock of Quebec" refers not only to a geographical "stronghold" but, more important, to "the curious endurance of a kind of culture, narrow but definite."

Willa Cather's interest in seventeenth-century Quebec, the life of pre-Colombian tribes, and the nineteenth-century Southwest might be interpreted as a romantic preference for exotic times and places. The past in Willa Cather's fiction, however, carries a different message. Instead of feeding an appetite for the exotic, a glimpse of the religion or the art of a past culture brings home the continuing importance of everyday life, of the meaningfulness of the constant daily efforts to concentrate upon and order an otherwise chaotic existence. Art and religion may provide the fullest examples of the impulse to order, but in Willa Cather they arise out of daily life, they are seen as continuations and deepenings of everyday routine.

In *The Song of the Lark*, the remains of the "Ancient People" in Panther Cañon give Thea Kronborg a sense of "older and higher obligations" than she has known before. For Thea, "these potsherds were like fetters that bound one to a long chain of human endeavor." The ruins of the Cliff-Dwellers inspire her to ignore "the hostility of comfortable, self-satisfied people toward any serious effort" and to pursue her musical career with single-minded devotion. The pottery of the "Ancient People" connects everyday life with art in a way that suddenly allows her to feel an importance in her own singing that she has never felt before.

In *The Professor's House* Tom Outland finds in Cliff City the same evidence of careful, thoughtful effort in everyday life:

> One thing we knew about these people; they hadn't built their town in a hurry. Everything proved their patience and deliberation. The cedar joists had been felled with stone axes and rubbed smooth with sand. The little poles that lay across them and held up the clay floor of the chamber above, were smoothly polished. The door lintels were carefully fitted.

Father Duchene comments that the safety of the cliff allowed the tribe to develop what he calls "the arts of peace":

> There is evidence on every hand that they lived for something more than food and shelter. They had an appreciation of comfort, and went even further than that. . . . There is unquestionably a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

distinct feeling for design in what you call the Cliff City.

Father Duchene feels "a reverence" for the Indian ruins because he sees that even a pagan religion can provide the order that lifts humanity "out of mere brutality." He imagines the tribe

making their mesa more and more worthy to be a home for man, purifying life by religious ceremonies and observances, caring respectfully for their dead, protecting the children, doubtless entertaining some feelings of affection and sentiment for this stronghold, where they had practically overcome the worst hardships.

The notion that art, religion, and everyday life are inextricably connected is given an explicit formulation by Professor Godfrey St. Peter and even associated with the prosaic: "We were better off," he replies to a student,

when even the prosaic matter of taking nourishment could have the magnificence of a sin. I don't think you help people by making their conduct of no importance—you impoverish them. And that's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives.

St. Peter points out that for the ancient Jews even "the cutting of the nails was a religious observance." Asserting parenthetically that "art and religion . . . are the same thing, in the end, of course," he notes that the Christian theologians' recasting of the Torah proceeded on artistic as well as moral lines:

The Christian theologians went over the books of the Law, like great artists, getting splendid effects by excision. They reset the stage with more space and mystery, throwing all the light upon a few sins of great dramatic value—only seven, you remember, and of those only three that are perpetually enthralling.

St. Peter's references to medieval religion and ancient Judaism may make it seem as though the union of religion, art, and everyday life is possible only in the past. His own willingness to allow himself to die, if not commit suicide outright, suggests that the present is empty once romantic love is over. Because he no longer loves his wife, he seems to have fallen out "of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family, indeed." He feels "a release from every obligation, from every sort of effort." St. Peter, however, recovers a sense of "older and higher obligations." He is rescued from asphyxiation, both literally and symbolically, by Augusta, the family's "sewing-woman . . . a reliable, methodical spinster, a German Catholic and very devout." Augusta provides for the professor "a corrective, a remedial influence." She reminds him of the world of prosaic obligations from which he was ready to escape:

Seasoned and sound and on the solid earth she surely was, and, for all her matter-of-factness and hard-handedness, kind and loyal. He even felt a sense of obligation toward her, instinctive, escaping definition, but real.

Professor St. Peter has lost romantic love; he must learn "to live without delight." But "there was still Augusta, however; a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound." Willa Cather does not directly connect Augusta's "remedial influence" to her religious faith, which the Professor does not share. Her final scene with Godfrey St. Peter after she rescues him is, however, filled with reminders of the religious basis of her life. The first sound St. Peter hears is "the clock of Augusta's church . . . ringing the hour." As he wakes up, he notices that Augusta is "reading a little much-worn religious book that she always carried in her handbag." Her faith allows her to face the world from which St. Peter had wanted to escape. She isn't "at all afraid to say things that were heavily, drearily true." She speaks about death without "any of the sentimentality that comes from a fear of dying," and also without the euphemistic formulas of religious uplift: "She talked about death as she spoke of a hard winter or a rainy March, or any of the sadnesses of nature."

In *Shadows on the Rock*, Count Frontenac and Bishop Laval bestride the scene, but it is the apothecary Euclide Auclair and his daughter Cécile who are presented as the bearers of the "narrow but definite" culture of France in the New World. Cather herself admitted that she was more interested in "an orderly little French household that went on trying to live decently" than in "Indian raids or the wild life of the forests." Euclide Auclair and Cécile, like Alexandra Bergson and Ántonia Shimerda, carry on past traditions and yet also create a new way of life. Kitchens as well as battlefields

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

do the work of history, and, for that matter, asserts Cather, "really, a new society begins with the salad dressing more than with the destruction of Indian villages." Madame Auclair dies having passed on to her daughter and thus to future generations a way of life:

> The sense of "our way,"—that was what she longed to leave with her daughter. She wanted to believe that when she herself was lying in this rude Canadian earth, life would go on almost unchanged in this room with its dear (and, to her, beautiful) objects; that the proprieties would be observed, all the little shades of feeling which make the common fine.

She succeeds because of what Willa Cather calls "very fine moral qualities in two women: the mother's unswerving fidelity to certain traditions, and the daughter's loyalty to her mother's wish."

Those, like Willa Cather, who admire "unswerving fidelity to certain traditions" are unlikely to be historical optimists. Cather's fiction suggests repeatedly that the most precious traditions will eventually be destroyed by heedless violence or equally heedless "progress." In *The Professor's House* Father Duchene speculates that the inhabitants of Cliff City "were probably wiped out, utterly exterminated, by some roving Indian tribe without culture or domestic virtues." The ruins of Panther Cañon depicted in *The Song of the Lark* remind Thea of Ray Kennedy's comment "that he never felt the hardness of the human struggle or the sadness of history as he felt among those ruins." *A Lost Lady* narrates not only Niel Herbert's disillusionment but also the passing of the "Old West" that "had been settled by dreamers, great-hearted adventurers who were unpractical to the point of magnificence" into the hands of "men like Ivy Peters, who had never dared anything, never risked anything." In the last pages of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the Navajo leader Eusabio, "one of the strong people of the old deep days," visits Father Latour's deathbed; he surely speaks for Cather herself when he tells the Archbishop that "men travel faster now, but I do not know if they go to better things." The "shadows" hanging over Quebec darken all of Cather's landscapes, even the Nebraska of *O Pioneers!* History is no more to be depended on than romantic love.

All the more reason, then, to appreciate the achievements of everyday life. Ray Kennedy's sense of "the sadness of history" did not lead him to despair, Thea remembers, but instead left him feeling "an obligation to do one's best." In "The Bohemian Girl" Nils Erickson, glancing at a group of older wives of the farmers gathered for a party, suddenly sees them in their true stature:

> They were a fine company of old women, and a Dutch painter would have loved to find them there together. . . . There were fat, rosy old women who looked hot in their best black dresses; spare, alert old women with brown, dark-veined hands; and several of almost heroic frame.

The art of Willa Cather does not purchase its affirmation of the importance of daily life by debunking the exceptional, as the romantic mystique purchases its exultation by denouncing family life. Willa Cather never traded in the sort of sentimentality that insists that all successful people are corrupt and all "little people" have hearts of gold. The Dutch paintings Cather loved usually concentrate on "a living room warmly furnished, or a kitchen full of food and coppers." In almost all, however, the rooms and kitchens include "a square window, open, through which one saw the masts of ships or a stretch of gray sea" ("On *The Professor's House*").

If Willa Cather found in the Dutch painters an appreciation of the prosaic that matched her own, she also found something more, a vision of the world that set the prosaic in the foreground but also took account of a dimension beyond. In Cather's own art, the prosaic outlook allows one to glimpse the hidden connections between grand moral principles and seemingly trivial choices, between everyday life and high art, which, in the end, included Willa Cather's own art.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

POETRY

Rediscovering Mina Loy

JOSHUA WEINER

Say the name Mina Loy and people still hear the name of a dead movie star, though with the help of this first biography and a new edition of poems Mina Loy is again re-establishing her originality and place in the history of modernism. Mina Loy's life story and the story of her work is a complicated one, as Loy seemed to epitomize her age at the same time that she eluded it. Her artistic passions led her to practice in a number of mediums—as painter, poet, fashion designer, maker of toys and artsy lamp shades and collages constructed from garbage and found objects. Her love affairs, so much a part of her artistic pursuit of "the beautiful," pulled her into two marriages, motherhood (four children), and a double-billed romance with the leading Italian futurists. Christian and Jewish, feminist and dadaist, Mina Loy considered herself a "mongrel" born into the first generation of the twentieth century's international avant-garde; in self-exile from a native Britain she found suffocating, she became a citizen of the world, residing in a number of cosmopolitan centers before finally becoming a naturalized American in 1946.

Her presence as a poet-artist in the United States—in other words, in downtown Manhattan—began with her appearance in the little magazines of the early 1900s, such as Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work*, *Rogue*, *Trend*, the *Little Review*, and *Others*. In 1923 Robert McAlmon published Mina Loy's first book, *Lunar Baedeker*, through his Contact Editions out of Dijon, the same press that issued Hemingway's first book, *Three Stories and Ten Poems*, and William Carlos Williams's important volume of poetry, *Spring and All*. Loy's book went out of print almost immediately, largely because of the customs confiscation of shipments to the United States that appeared to violate obscenity laws. Thirty-five years later, when Jonathan Williams, at the equally small Jargon Press, engaged Loy for preparation of a second volume, she replied coyly, "But, why do you waste your time on these thoughts of mine? I was never a poet."

Yet by the time Mina Loy arrived in Manhattan in 1916, she had made a reputation as one of the most avant of the avant-garde based on her work as a poet; and it is as a poet that she survives. In fact, pick up almost any literary memoir from the period, and Loy is bound to pop up on this page or that, part of the experimentalist milieux of the early twentieth century, but never quite having found a place in our literary histories where the spotlight of attention might fully illuminate her. Everywhere yet nowhere, Loy has remained at the margins, but remained nonetheless by virtue of the dogged advocation of the most dogged poet-critics of American modernism's second generation, Yvor Winters and Kenneth Rexroth, and the devotion of a small but growing group of poets and scholars.

No doubt this group will continue to grow. For scholars interested in the theoretical connections between gender and language, the emergence of the New Woman at the turn of the century, the relation between Anglo-American and Continental modernism, the shift from a Victorian to a modernist aesthetic, and for other specialists, too, Mina Loy provides a rich new subject for current academic trends. For poets, in whose hands her future is perhaps even more dependent, Loy provides a lost model of how to exploit the language and make use of personal experience that—be-

✪ JOSHUA WEINER is completing a doctoral dissertation on Mina Loy at the University of California, Berkeley. He is currently the Writing Coordinator at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cause of her own lack of concern and the rare publication of her poems collected in book form—has disappeared from view. It is as if, after years of listening to family stories about the heroic deeds and embarrassing mishaps of Grandpa Ezra and Old Possum, Uncle Wally and Auntie Moore, an old misplaced chest was sprung, and out poured the memorabilia and artifacts of a forgotten cousin who had burned everybody's backside.

With the publication of *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), Roger Conover corrects the errors transmitted in his former edition, *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (Jargon, 1982). This time he arranges the poems by chronology of composition, conveys some of the typographical experimentation of Loy's inventive "Feminist Manifesto," and includes a previously unpublished essay by Loy on modern poetry and a revealing autobiographical sketch. (Loy's important long poem, *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, ideally would have been included here, but it is to be reissued soon as a separate volume.) Conover has provided the reader of this edition with more than adequate notes and an appendix of several early "Victorian" poems and the truncated version of "Love Songs" that ran in the Contact Editions issue of 1923. No doubt some will complain that the notes are too long (they run to fifty pages) and too elaborately explicative; but no one can argue that they are not excellently done, sometimes constituting mini-essays in themselves, like the entry on Italian futurism, relaying contextual as well as textual information that the serious general reader will appreciate.

Carolyn Burke, an academic and the author of numerous scholarly articles on Mina Loy, has written a groundbreaking biography, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), that is also happily aimed at a wide audience. Her book succeeds to a great degree in dramatically placing Loy in the various locations of her artistic activity in Europe and North America, making it as much the biography of a cultural moment as it is of a single and singular life; as such it provides an excellent introduction to the whole subject of modernism. And, I would add, the book is a fine example of a *feminist* biography—that is, one that continually asks, what was it like, not just for Mina Loy, but for a woman to circulate in an early twentieth-century avant-garde so dominated by men, trying to make herself into a modern literary force.

Like many members of this century's first generation of modernists bent on self-invention and "making it new," Mina Loy started out as someone else. Born Mina Gertrude Lowy in London in 1882, her father, Sigmund Lowy, was a Jewish Hungarian immigrant and her mother, Julia Bryan, a Christian Englishwoman. Mina inherited from her father a talent for languages and an interest in learning, and he tried to provide her with some of the opportunities for study he himself never had, having been forced to take up tailoring rather than to pursue his own bookish and artistic interests. Loy's mother remained her lifelong psychological adversary and the source of many of the tensions Mina tried to reject as she grew up and grew apart. While her father never tried to hide his foreignness—he never lost his accent or attended church with the family—her mother became increasingly self-conscious about her husband's Jewishness and status as a tradesman, a self-consciousness that grew into a sense of shame exacerbated by hypersensitivity to Victorian social and religious mores.

An artist by nature, Mina Loy had her antennae up, as Pound might say, from the very beginning. Realizing his daughter's talent and potential, Sigmund Lowy provided at her request volumes of poetry by the Rosettis (though he didn't think much of them) and sent her to a rather conservative art school, the St. John's Wood School, where Mina quickly earned a reputation as one of the more outstanding students for her visionary compositions. While Sigmund supported Mina's efforts, Julia criticized both her daughter's artwork and her behavior, finding them too dangerous, too sexual, too modern. "Vicious slut," Julia is reported to have shouted as she destroyed Mina's work. Such violent responses from her mother led Mina into a psychological double bind, which she continued to feel throughout her career: being a good artist was synonymous, as Carolyn Burke puts it, with being a bad girl. Burke deepens this sense of contradiction in Mina by drawing out the complicated politics of being a female artist in fin de siècle Britain—chief among them, the difficulty of aspiring to first-rate artistic achievement in a society that did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not particularly care to see flourishing first-rate women artists.

To his credit, Sigmund Lowy had some sense of this struggle and responded by arranging for Mina to study in Munich with Angelo Jank at the Kunstlerinnverein. The classes, freedom from her family, and exposure to the Jugendstil that in 1900 became notable for thwarting tradition, breaking down distinctions between the high and low, the fine arts and the industrial arts—all combined to inspire Mina with a new sense of possibility for herself as an artist.

She pursued this possibility by agitating for further study in Paris, hoping to escape her parents, whose deteriorating health and estrangement contributed to the beginning of Loy's own neurasthenia, a nervous disorder that would blossom later in her life like a perennial *fleur-du-mal.* Through the Academie Colarossi, where she next enrolled, Loy eventually met the man she would later marry and divorce (though not before bearing him a son and daughter), the English painter Stephen Haweis. From all accounts Haweis was a creepy, if fascinating fellow, with the reputation of an ingratiating aesthete with a taste for melodrama. Like the mysterious initial attraction between her parents, Loy's attraction to Haweis remains difficult to grasp. Burke conjectures, reasonably, that the part of Loy's personality that remained passive in the face of her mother's tyrannous grip on her family's household responded in kind to Haweis's appeal for sympathy. "I began to be pressed by chance," Mina writes, "into my unfounded relationship with a mannikin."

Haweis turned out to be a mannikin with designs, however. He routinely sucked up Loy's allowance and used her fear of disgrace to his advantage: after becoming pregnant, she accepted his proposal of a platonic marriage that would leave each his and her freedom while insuring the continued cash flow from her father. Loy worked ingeniously at inventing some of the colorful and free-floating modern fashions that originated in Montparnasse at this time and garnered some critical recognition at the 1906 Salon D'Autumne (a controversial exhibition featuring experimentalists and such "primitives" as Gauguin). But her life with Haweis merely extended the unhappiness of her childhood and adolescence, and she continued to feel that she was stuck in a hopeless psychological rut.

All that changed for Mina Loy around 1910, after three years in the British expatriate scene of Florence, where she and Haweis had moved after the death of their first baby and Loy's second pregnancy, this time by a French doctor. As an antidote to the endless tea drinking and knee-jerk idolatry of past culture among the "Anglo-Florentines," Loy pursued "the New" in everything: poetry, woman, politics, science, even thought itself, from theosophy to Bergson's notions of flux, intuition, and creative evolution, to Eastern mysticism, theories of sub- and super-consciousness, and the practice of Christian Science (an interest she later shared in her friendship with the American surrealist Joseph Cornell).

When Mabel Dodge blew into town with her self-important airs, Loy found a place in the intellectual and spiritual pursuits at Dodge's Villa Curonia estate, meeting—most significantly for her own discovery of how to burn off the old habits of linguistic usage—Gertrude Stein, who provided Loy with the opportunity to read *The Making of Americans,* which was still in manuscript form. (She "has always been able to understand," remarked Stein of Loy in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas.*)

Yet all of Loy's ambivalent feelings toward a personal history marked by emotional deprivation and a sense of exile, and a cultural history never quite made available to her as a woman, turned into outright rejection through her involvement with the Italian futurists. F. T. Marinetti, the self-proclaimed "caffeine of Europe," feeling overburdened by a Tuscan and Roman cultural inheritance and hostile toward a technologically backward economy, led like-minded artists to conceive of a new kind of man who would burst from the ground of technological innovation; they imagined themselves as modern machine visionaries, advocating art embodying speed, aggression, bravado, the representation of dynamism and simultaneity, and literary work freed from the laws of syntax and conventional typography.

Loy found Marinetti utterly galvanizing. He was given to such stunts as speeding through the streets in a sports car while firing volleys of written manifestos out the window. His energetic theatricality filled her with a visceral enthusiasm for a revolution that addressed itself to politics, economics, and the mass media as well as art. Eventually, they became lovers, joined in an *affaire futuriste* that grew in com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plications as it triangulated to include Giovanni Papini, the editor of *Lacerba* and leader of a futurist faction associated with that radical journal.

Love intrigues aside, the spirit of a no-holds-barred attack on the past invigorated Loy's sense that, to address the nature of a new social, political, and technological reality, it was necessary to discover and invent new artistic forms. Under the imperative pressure to free herself from standard poetical phrases and conventional frames of perception, Loy's writing broke from her earlier, rhetorically floundering and metrically incompetent Pre-Raphaelite imitations to a free verse with its own distinctive music, diction, intellectual passion, and feminist point of view.

As early as February 1914, Mina Loy was writing to Mabel Dodge that she felt herself "in the throes of conversion to Futurism—But I shall never convince myself—there is no hope in any system that 'combats the mal avec le mal'—and that is really Marinetti's philosophy—though he is one of the most satisfying personalities I ever came in contact with." Despite her enthusiasm for the futurist battle against sentimentality in love, her criticism of the movement deepened as she viewed its condescension toward women as incompatible with her own vision of how "creative consciousness" might expand.

"Do tell me what you are making of Feminism," Loy writes in a letter to Mabel Dodge. "Have you any idea in what direction the sex must be shoved—psychologically I mean—bread and butter bores me rather." And to Carl Van Vechten, "What I feel now are feminist politics—But in a cosmic way that may not fit in anywhere—." In true futurist form she brought her simmering feminism to a boil in the unpublished (though circulated) "Feminist Manifesto," declaring that "the Feminist movement as instituted is INADEQUATE. . . . There is no half measure, no scratching of the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition. Nothing short of Absolute Demolition will bring about reform. . . . Leave off looking to men to find out what you are *not*. Seek within yourselves to find out what you *are*."

Between 1910 and 1916 Mina Loy discovered that she was not a futurist. But having rubbed up against them, she sharpened a verbal technique and sensibility capable of combining lyricism with satire, and her poems and plays that made fun of futurist male egotism did so from an explicitly feminist position so pungent and unusual that Pound considered one of them, "The Effectual Marriage," one of the most memorable poems to appear in the first three decades of the century (he reprinted it twice). The poems from this early period demonstrate throughout how Loy adapted, not so much the specific techniques of futurism, but the general energy of revolt and criticism that futurism inspired in her.

Loy's early appearances in the Manhattan little magazines of the day and her friendships with those circulating in the avant-garde there, such as Dodge and Carl Van Vechten, lent a discernible buzz to her arrival from the futurist front. When Alfred Kreymborg published some of Loy's "Love Songs" in *Others* (the "others" being poets not appearing in Harriet Monroe's more mainstream *Poetry*), "detractors shuddered at Mina Loy's subject matter [sex]" he writes, "and derided her elimination of punctuation marks and the audacious spacing of her lines." Her "sophistry, clinical frankness, sardonic conclusions, wedded to a madly elliptical style scornful of regulation grammar [and] syntax . . . horrified our gentry and drove our critics into furious despair." This controversial sequence, inspired by her affair with Papini, begins with Loy's most infamous poem, in which she refigures the god of love as a swine of carnal appetite:

Spawn of Fantasies
Silting the appraisable
Pig Cupid his rosy snout
Rooting erotic garbage
"Once upon a time"
Pulls a weed white star-topped
Among wild oats sown in mucous-membrane

I would an eye in a Bengal light
Eternity in a sky-rocket
Constellations in an ocean
Whose rivers run no fresher
Than a trickle of saliva

These are suspect places

I must live in my lantern
Trimming subliminal flicker
Virginal to the bellows
Of Experience
Coloured glass

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The shock of such direct, physical description coupled with a collage-like method of arranging fragmented groups of phrases appeared in 1915 like a thrown gauntlet. In suggesting something akin to the raunchy satiric wit of the Earl of Rochester in the new modern idiom, the sequence is all the more challenging for expressing an *unkind* female sexual sensibility lit from within by a lamp of "subliminal flicker."

Loy's poetic sequence caused enough commotion to attract the attention of the New York press, which sent reporters to cover (can one even imagine this today?) the appearance in print of a small poetry journal. Loy's poems were news; they expressed an analytical mind considering sexual feeling without any of the conventional poetic dressing of end-rhyme or traditional meter that a general reader of poetry expected; and they came fresh from Europe, exciting, with their new ideas, poets such as William Carlos Williams, who recalled that the work was met with "wild enthusiasm among free-verse writers, slightly less enthusiasm among Sunday Magazine Section reporters, and really quite a stir in the country at large."

Mina Loy's entire career, in fact, is marked by her role as something of the honeybee of early twentieth-century modernism, cross-pollinating the various fields of artistic experiment from Munich to Paris to Florence to New York, later Berlin, and then back again. She helped cut the edge, define the standard, delimit the territory of avant-garde activity along with such innovators as Marcel Duchamp (who was also in New York at the time and who would shock everyone with an overturned urinal entitled "Fountain"). In the artistic circle of Walter Conrad Arensberg, which included Duchamp, Williams, Marianne Moore, Francis Picabia, Wallace Stevens, and Charles Demuth, Loy provided a crucial link between the Europeans and the Americans, many of whom—such as Williams—couldn't speak French but were themselves just starting to absorb and adapt Continental experiments in the arts to their own work. As much as any other writer and artist associated with the New York avant-garde of the teens and twenties, Loy's ubiquitous presence is actually central to our sense of the period: acting for the Provincetown Players; giving interviews on the significance of the controversial Independent's Exhibition; contributing through her participation in the production of the journal *The Blind Man* to the emergence of New York Dada; and giving readings with other poets that addressed issues of conscience regarding the mounting war effort.

Most of the poems considered her best—"Der Blinde Junge," "Apology of Genius," "Lunar Baedeker," "Brancusi's Golden Bird"—date from the twenties, after Loy lost her second husband, the father of her fourth child, and the great love of her life, the proto-dadaist and poet-boxer, Arthur Cravan, in a mysterious draft-dodging incident in Mexico. (Loy was with him there throughout the war.) Their happiness together was so adventurous, ecstatic, and brief that Cravan's disappearance in a small craft off the coast of Salina Cruz became one of the devastating and defining experiences of Loy's life, one which she returned to in both poetry and prose. This postwar period, full of terrible grief for Loy, saw her eventually leaving with others the pervasive anti-Bolshevik hysteria and crumbling of the New York avant-garde for Florence, Berlin, and, inevitably, Paris.

Paris in the twenties, a period made so famous by the many "lost generation" memoirs, seemed to Loy like a step backwards: it was originally Europe she had left behind for New York, the city that most embodied the modern spirit. Loy's ambivalent feelings regarding her return provide a kind of countermeasure or darker harmony to the melody of young American ex-pats excited by the opportunity to embrace the *really old* world in the guise of expressing what they considered a new sensibility. Nevertheless, Loy was as much a part of the activities in Paris as she had been in Manhattan, finding herself in the circles of Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Beach, Ford Madox Ford, and Natalie Barney. In addition to *Lunar Baedeker*, her guide to the aesthetic moons of modernism, Loy published sections of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, the long autobiographical poem that Pound called a free-verse novel.

Strapped for cash, Loy also conceived a variety of entrepreneurial ventures (she begged Mabel Dodge for money to start a restaurant, but Dodge declined), the most successful being a custom lamp-shade gallery backed by Peggy Guggenheim. (Loy's imagination continually brimmed with commercial ideas, a wedding of necessity and a restless urge to invent and fabricate; a box in the Loy archives

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

holds, among a number of sparkling oddities, designs for a new kind of material she called "chatoyant," a toy she pitched to F.A.O. Schwartz called "Build Your Own Alphabet," and an improvement on the conventional squeegee. . . .) Her business practices, however, clashed with her scorn for business, an inherent conflict between an artistic elitism and moneymaking impulses that virtually guaranteed commercial failure. Loy's struggle to keep herself and her daughters financially afloat weighed heavily upon her even as her social calendar remained full. From Carolyn Burke's account, the split between Loy's concern over meat and potatoes and her high spirits among the notable literati suggest a strain that reached its dramatic peak when Giles, her fourteen-year-old son, died in the Bermudas under the care of Haweis. Loy—who in anger had estranged herself from the boy—threatened to jump out a window; afterwards she wrote that her life seemed a "stupid muddle of poverty and tragedy."

As her renewed interest in painting and the autobiographical prose increased, Loy stopped writing poetry, a silence that would last until she moved back to New York to be near her daughter Joella and her son-in-law, Julien Levy, then a well-known gallery owner and promoter of surrealism. It was not, however, a happy return. From the late thirties through the early forties, Loy retreated from the society of her friends and colleagues into an increasingly thickening miasma of psychic distress. When it lifted—as it did with her (now patriotic) concern over a new war effort—Loy worked on visual collages and constructions made from found objects and refuse she collected in walks through her Bowery neighborhood. Whether observing "bird-economies" in the musically exquisite poem "Property of Pigeons," or the life of winos in her poem "Hot Cross Bum," Loy perceived the Bowery as a kind of biosphere prior to heavenly attainment, a marriage between heaven and hell where valuative inversions took place daily.

Known in the neighborhood as the Duchess, she withdrew further from the society of fellow artists while residing as a kind of eccentric Bowery aristocrat through the 1940s and early 1950s. Loy continued to write poems and construct collages and was sufficiently moved by the work of Joseph Cornell to write a prose appreciation. In prose, too, she explored her divided religious heritage and continued thinking about the relation between Western and Eastern traditions of mysticism and spirituality.

Loy joined her daughters in Aspen in 1953. She never returned to New York, missing the publication party in 1958 for her second book, *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables* (Rexroth called it "a real EVENT, like the opening of King Tut's tomb"), and a gallery exhibit of her Bowery constructions held the following year that was well attended by the New York literary and art press, in addition to many of her old cohorts, among them Marcel Duchamp, Kay Boyle, and Djuna Barnes. She died in Aspen in 1966.

If Carolyn Burke's biography succeeds, as I think it does, in presenting a persuasive case for re-establishing Mina Loy's place in the history of modernism, the current test for her poetry remains severe: what do Loy's poems have to offer a reader beyond a textual illustration of historical significance? Do her poems merely fix her in the various milieux she traveled, or do they succeed in rising above their contexts to reach us now? Along what frequencies does Loy broadcast?

Despite her "conversion" to a futurist vision, if not the futurist program, Loy retained a Pre-Raphaelite attraction to the ideal of "the beautiful" as a category of aesthetic experience she tried to capture in an artistic form; but where the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood remained wedded to a cult medievalism that they refashioned in their own version of historical styles and motifs, Mina Loy found her ideal in the fragments of a present fragmented world, a world in which "the beautiful" lay hidden in what appeared ugly to conventional sight; and she expressed this vision by trying to make new noises with the English language. "Lepers of the moon/all magically diseased," Loy writes in "Apology of Genius" (1922), "we come among you/innocent/of our luminous sores." She ends the poem:

> In the raw caverns of the Increate
> we forge the dusk of Chaos
> to that imperious jewellery of the Universe
> —the Beautiful—
>
> While to your eyes
> a delicate crop
> of criminal mystic immortelles
> stands to the censor's scythe.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

While this smacks of an art-for-art's-sake sentiment—the heroic artist pitted against the censors of society—it also conveys some of the risk in such forging: those "mystic immortelles" often *were* criminal in the eyes of the censors, and artists perished for having grown them. This sense of ostracism as an artist, coupled, no doubt, with her draconian childhood, led Loy to an identification with the outcasts and marginalized figures in society—homeless, abused, self-abusing, those struggling merely to live—an identification that pulled her away from the decadent fringe and into a vital engagement with social reality, as evident here in another poem written in the early twenties.

Der Blinde Junge

The dam Bellona
littered
her eyeless offspring
Kriegsopfer
upon the pavements of Vienna

Sparkling precipitate
the spectral day
involves
the visionless obstacle

this slow blind face
pushing its virginal nonentity
against the light

Pure purposeless eremite
of centripetal sentience

Upon the carnose horologe of the ego
the vibrant tendon index moves not

since the black lightning desecrated
the retinal altar

Void and extinct
this planet of the soul
strains from the craving throat
in static flight upslanting

A downy youth's snout
nozzling the sun
drowned in dumfounded instinct

Listen!
illuminati of the coloured earth
How this expressionless "thing"
blows out damnation and concussive dark

Upon a mouth-organ

Loy presents this blind youth as a kind of puppy carelessly discarded by the bitch-goddess of war. Loy's technique combines two distinct qualities: an erudite and polyglot diction so consistently unusual that a generally forgotten word, such as *horologe* or *carnose* seems like a signature neologism, when it is merely off to the side of our more mundane lexicon (as Roger Conover notes, one doesn't need a critical guide to read Loy, just a good dictionary); and a restlessly shifting presentation of—or approach to—her subject, as if Loy were holding an object in her hand and continually turning it, each new cluster of description building on the previous one without finally forming a conventionally coherent perspective of the whole (thus suggesting Loy's affiliation with cubism). What Loy shows us through such prismatic vision is a particular rendering of the "downy youth's snout/ nozzling the sun" combining with abstract formulation—"a virginal nonentity," a "void and extinct planet of the soul."

This is a typical combination for Loy, who always keeps one poetic eye on the physical world before her even as she reaches for a larger metaphysical connection. But Loy's authority here emanates from a location outside the temple of art and in the world, where her technique becomes a vehicle for expressing a bracing Blakean indignation at the blind youth's position in *our* eyes, "the illuminati of the coloured earth," who remain blind ourselves to the youth's existence and deaf to the passionate music of "this expressionless 'thing.'" Rhythmically jagged, intense, and verbally compressed, the poem burns with a cold heat—consider the condemnation of complacency packed into that one ironic verb "involves," placed on its own line in the second stanza.

As much as Pound admired Loy's poems, he had difficulty locating emotion in them, so taken was he by their irony and intellection. But Loy's irony and mental acuity, impressive and unsettling as it is, never kept her from revealing herself. Loy is a more personal, intimate poet than either Pound, Eliot, Stevens, H.D., or Marianne Moore, so bent were they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on suppressing the personal in their poetry. Only William Carlos Williams captures the same quality of an art made from direct, immediate experience; but where his poems seem full of warmth and a deep joy in experiencing the physical world, Loy's poems express her continual struggle, like the blind youth's, to live and play her music. She writes in an early poem, "Parturition" (1914), about giving birth:

I am the centre
Of a circle of pain
Exceeding its boundaries in every direction

The business of the bland sun
Has no affair with me
In my congested cosmos of agony
From which there is no escape
On infinitely prolonged nerve-vibrations
Or in contraction
To the pin-point nucleus of being

What other poet in 1914 could have written this? Its candor seems utterly contemporary, while its decorum suggests alternative expressive possibilities to those following the poems by Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Using a contracting and expanding free-verse measure to suggest mimetically the rhythms of labor, Loy finds that giving birth contains an essential knowledge, "the pin-point nucleus of being." Her vision reveals a hidden world. And it was this kind of knowledge she looked for and found in the work of other modernists: "the Alpha and Omega/of Form" in "Brancusi's Golden Bird"; the way Stein "crushed the tonnage/ of consciousness/congealed to phrases/ to extract/a radium of the word"; and in Joyce's *Ulysses* ("word made flesh/and feeding upon itself/with erudite fangs") and painting by Wyndham Lewis, which appeared to her as "pyramidical survivors/in the cyclorama of space."

Toward the end of her life, Loy confronted dementia and physical decay, and these predicaments too became occasions for her direct, unsparing, unsentimental reckoning, as in this late poem.

An Aged Woman

The past has come apart
events are vagueing
the future is inexploitable
the present pain.
Not even pain has that precision
with which it struck in youth-time

More like moth
eroding internal organs
hanging or falling down
in a spoiled closet

Does your mirror Bedevil you
or is the impossible
possible to senility
enabling the erstwhile agile
narrow silhouette of self
to hold in huge reserve
this excessive incognito
of a Bulbous stranger
only to be exorcised by death

Dilation has entirely eliminated
your long reality.

Mina Loy's imagination is, first and last, a linguistic one—Pound even went so far as to coin the term *logopoiea*, "the dance of the intellect among words," to describe her poetry. She comes up with the verb "vagueing," and there is poetic pleasure amidst the pain in such apt invention. Loy's "erstwhile agile/narrow silhouette of self," confronting itself in the unforgiving and paradoxical mirror, finds its company in such a poem as Thomas Hardy's "I Look into My Glass," in which "throbbings of noontide" shake the poet's fragile frame with memories of youth. Mina Loy's idiom is eccentric, her diction favoring abstraction, her music heavily reliant on alliteration and intricate assonantal embedded rhyme. But her vision of the self as *dilating* in its gradual atomic dispersion, for example, bespeaks as tragic a sensibility as Hardy's, and one that does not lie about what it perceives.

Mina Loy's originality is never frivolous or trivial. The work is difficult at times, but its difficulty is part of its authenticity. Her poems are an acquired taste, as for strong coffee, and as addictive. She ended the above poem with her signature and the beguiling post-dating, "July 12/1984," eighteen years after her actual death. Her own brand of futurist to the end, Mina Loy comes to us once more bearing the kind of news that continues to speak to the present. It is good to have her back.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Brussels Sprouts

CATHARINE SAVAGE BROSMAN

In drag-foot March, and fastening my coat
against a churlish wind, as I arrive
at the greengrocer's stall I have in mind
Bermuda onions, chard, asparagus,
red peppers, corn—a salad for the eye—
and long-stemmed hothouse marvels hastening
the spring in every hue; but daffodils

to mark St. David's Day have frumpy blooms,
carnations wither, and the tulip buds
are February's orphans. As for fruit
and vegetables, the apples look as hard
as wood, and flavorless; my leafy thought
of salads dies. But broccoli is out
in florets, with the kindred cabbages

and Brussels sprouts. Such lowly ancestry
they have, these sprouts, so plain! They could be beads
or dresser knobs, or marbles for a game
with winter, and at thirty-seven pence
a pound are not patrician. Yet their sweet
and minimal design, their modesty,
repeating an idea of round desire

and touched with Cézanne blue, invite conceits
with painted tables, sunshine in the shape
of fruit, a bowl, a porcelain carafe,
or curtains at a window by Matisse—
as if in all things green there were a grace
awaiting hand or eye to contemplate
the world transcended in its common ways.

✪ CATHARINE SAVAGE BROSMAN is the author of *The Shimmering Maya and Other Essays* and *Passages,* a book of verse.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Profile—Straight On

JEREMY BERNSTEIN

SIX NOT-SO-EASY PIECES: LECTURES ON SYMMETRY, RELATIVITY, AND SPACE-TIME. *By Richard Feynman. Addison-Wesley. $25.*

In the 1960s and 1970s, when I was writing long profiles of scientists for *The New Yorker*, it was frequently suggested to me that I do a profile of Richard Feynman. While Feynman was not then widely known outside the métier of physics, he was universally known to all of us inside it. His Mozartean genius in physics seemed to be combined with an almost equally Mozartean urge to play the clown. We all knew that he had cracked safes at Los Alamos during the war and that he regularly performed in public on the bongo drums. Some of us knew of the tragic death of his first wife from tuberculosis and their communication games as they attempted to confound the security system at Los Alamos. His striking good looks and long hair made him seem like a somewhat superannuated flower child of the sixties—in short, he had all the makings of a perfect *New Yorker* profile.

Nonetheless, I did not try to write one. The reason is that I was concerned about Feynman's ego. All very good scientists have, in my experience, very large egos. This is not too hard to understand. From a very young age, they have been outstanding at doing something that is widely admired; they are the brightest in their class—brighter than their parents, brighter than anybody they know. It is bound to go to their heads. This kind of ego I could deal with. I understood it and respected it, but Feynman, it seemed to me from having observed him several times close up, had a second kind of ego—one that I was not sure that I could deal with. He had—with no disrespect intended—an actor's ego. He was constantly performing. When Freeman Dyson first met him in 1948 he wrote to his parents that Feynman was "half genius and half buffoon." In 1988, after Feynman's death, he revised this to note that Feynman was "all genius and all buffoon."

If you did not know who Feynman was and ran into him at a bar, say, you might well think that he was either a stand-up comic or a New York taxi driver with an almost caricatural accent. He did not have, or feigned not to have, any interest in "culture." That he would have read *The New Yorker* seemed inconceivable to me. That he would have had the patience to sit through the hours of interviewing—to say nothing of the endless fact checking—that doing a serious *New Yorker* profile involved seemed equally inconceivable to me. I imagined trying to sit in rapt attention for days on end while Feynman "performed" and then, by not being quite appreciative enough at some crucial moment, losing everything. I concluded that it was better not to try.

But around 1980 a colleague of mine who was then a junior faculty member at Caltech, where Feynman taught, and who saw Feynman on a regular basis, told me that Feynman was interested in having an article written about him and was, in particular, interested in having it written by me. This seemed quite astonishing to me. While I had been introduced to Feynman several times, each time he had given me the impression of not having

JEREMY BERNSTEIN is the author of *Cranks, Quarks and the Cosmos, The Uranium Club, In the Himalayas, A Theory for Everything,* and *An Introduction to Cosmology.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the foggiest idea of who I was. As unlikely as my colleague's story appeared, obviously it was something that had to be followed up, so I called Feynman. What my colleague reported was true, and Feynman explained to me the circumstances of his epiphany. He had been in a dentist's office, he said, where there were several copies of *The New Yorker*. Having nothing better to do he started to browse through them. He assured me that otherwise he never read the magazine. As luck would have it, he had come across an article of mine in which I had referred to him as a "brilliant lecturer." God knows he was. I have never heard a better one in physics or in anything else. His love of the subject and his love of performance produced marvels. You came away from a Feynman lecture feeling better about everything—no doubt about it. On the basis of this evaluation he had decided that I was, quite possibly, an acceptable Boswell.

That having been settled, it remained to establish a modus operandi. I was then teaching full-time on the east coast while Feynman was in Pasadena. I explained to him that in a few weeks I would have my spring break and could then come to California. That seemed agreeable, and he then suggested that I stay at his house. While this was appealing in some sense, I did not think that it was a very good idea.

Unless you have actually conducted interviews like this, you have no idea how much of a strain they are. You must constantly concentrate on getting a full and coherent story while at the same time attempting to make enough contact with your subject so that he or she thinks that what is happening is just a conversation. And this can go on for several hours at a time. I often come away from one of these sessions with a splitting headache. The last thing in the world I want to do is to carry on with them after hours. I need to be alone if for no other reason than to listen to the tapes I have made so as to decide how to proceed. I made some explanation to Feynman having to do with not wanting to impose on his family life, and he said that there would be no problem in locating me in a nearby motel.

So far so good, but then Feynman asked how much of his time I would take in order to do these interviews. The only honest answer I could give him was that I did not know. I did a profile of Lewis Thomas—not one of my better efforts—on the basis of one long luncheon interview, which was all the time he wanted to spare, and a few follow-up phone calls. But I had interviewed I. I. Rabi and Hans Bethe for well over a year before I had written anything.

I had no idea where in this spectrum Feynman would fall. He seemed to accept this and told me that when the time came his secretary would arrange for the motel. I then proceeded to alert *The New Yorker* that a profile of Feynman might be possible and received a green light. But two weeks later Feynman called. He asked again how much of his time I would take, and I gave him the same answer as before. He then said, "But you told me it would only take a couple of hours." I replied that that was certainly not what I had said. He seemed to accept this and as far as I knew our plans were still intact. Ten days or so before I was actually scheduled to go to California, I called Feynman's secretary to confirm the arrangements for my motel room. "Oh," she said, "there is a film crew from the BBC coming at that time to film Professor Feynman, and he will not be able to see you." I gave up. Someone else could write Feynman's profile.

In fact, the first person to do so was Feynman himself, after a fashion. In 1985 he published *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman! Adventures of a Curious Character*. These are "stories," he told Ralph Leighton—the son of a Caltech physics colleague—with whom he occasionally played music. Leighton taped his conversations with Feynman over a period of several years. This taping was surely going on before the time of my contact with Feynman. The book consists of what are essentially transcriptions of the tapes. The voice is authentic Feynman. It is all there. You can almost hear the New York accent. Whether the stories are factually accurate is another matter. I do know that one of the people that Feynman discusses was so angry about Feynman's characterization of their joint work as being essentially entirely Feynman's doing that he was thinking of suing. What a lawsuit that would have been!

It is difficult to imagine a *New Yorker* fact checker dealing with these stories: trying to locate, for example, the bartender in the Alibi Room in Buffalo, New York, where Feynman claims to have gotten into a fistfight with someone in the men's room. I doubt I could have brought forth these tales in a week's worth of interviews or even in a year's. Likewise for those in the book's sequel *What Do*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You Care What Other People Think? which was published shortly after Feynman's death. On the other hand, I doubt if anyone could get any idea of what made Feynman a great physicist on the basis of these stories either. He was a great character, one might conclude, but a great physicist?

Since his death a number of books have appeared describing Feynman's life and work. (Of these, my favorite by far is *QED and the Men Who Made It* by the physicist Silvan S. Schweber, published in 1994. Schweber has a deep understanding of the physics and the right sense of balance about the life. But, as perhaps is fitting, one must be a physicist really to understand the book.) A sort of minor cottage industry has developed that appears to consist of repackaging and recycling old Feynman lectures. (A similar industry has developed around Steven Hawking.) The latest production from the Feynman factory is called *Six Not-So-Easy Pieces.*

If you strip away the jazzy title, the appreciative introduction by Roger Penrose, and the several pictures of Feynman, what you have precisely are six chapters that have been lifted bodily—without change—from Feynman's 1960s introductory course in physics that was published in 1963 under the title *The Feynman Lectures on Physics.* These are lectures that Feynman gave to beginning students at Caltech in 1961–62 and then again in 1962–63 in an attempt to revitalize what had become, in some people's view, a dreary undergaduate program. If the aim was to inspire the undergraduates, these lectures were not, as Feynman himself admitted, a great success. The attendance was high, but it consisted in considerable part of faculty members and graduate students who were happy to hear Feynman lecture on anything. The lectures are simply too sophisticated for even Caltech freshmen to follow. I cannot imagine anyone using Feynman's original book as a text in a course. I am sure, however, that many of us, myself included, have used it as a source in preparing lectures on similar subjects for similar courses. His lectures are full of nuggets of insight.

I had not read these lectures for several years, so when confronted with the recycled six chapters I decided that I would approach them by pretending that they had come from an anonymous author who was trying to get a modern physics text published and was presenting these chapters, which do sort of hang together, as a sample. How would I react?

The first thing that would strike me is that they were evidently written by someone who was a master of the subject. This is something that a layperson might not be able to detect, just as a layperson might not realize how great a pianist was simply by the way he or she played the "easy" parts. In this kind of exposition you must know precisely what to leave out as well as what to include. I could tell by reading this material that whoever wrote it had a voluminous iceberg of understanding below the tip he chose to reveal.

Whether I could have deciphered that it was written by Feynman is a different question. In 1697 Isaac Newton learned of a challenge problem that had been posed by the Swiss mathematician Johann Bernoulli. He solved it in a few hours and sent the solution, unsigned, to Bernoulli. Bernoulli knew immediately that it could only have come from Newton and made the famous Latin epigram *"tanquam ex ungue leonem,"* which somewhat fancifully might be translated as "the lion can be recognized by his claw prints." There is not a lot in these lectures that I would have been able to identify as Feynman's "claw prints"—certainly the claw prints of a very good physicist—but not uniquely those of Feynman.

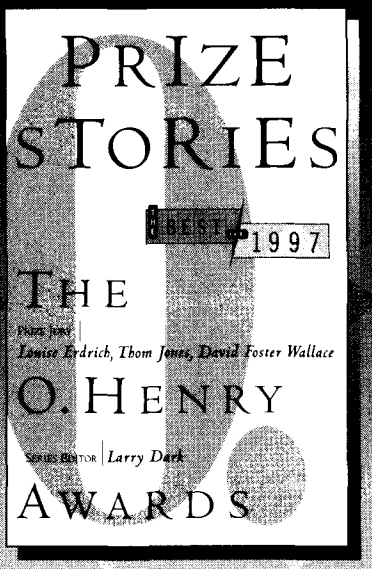
The second thing I would have noted about these lectures is that they are not self-contained. Such terms as "Galilean transformations" are used without any prior definition or explanation. What is worse is that references are made, important references, to chapters of the original lectures that are not included in the six reproduced here. The reader is left suspended in mid-air. This might be understandable if what was being presented really was a sample of a promised whole, but considering that these six lectures are being packaged as an entity, it is quite inexcusable. It shows sloppy and indifferent editing and makes the whole project seem tacky. Furthermore, the lectures seem somewhat dated. The subject matter—the theory of relativity—is now part of "classical" physics, having been created at the beginning of the century. But things have happened in the thirty-four years since Feynman gave his lectures.

Experiments that Feynman says have not been performed have now been performed. There is even a remarkable set of experiments

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

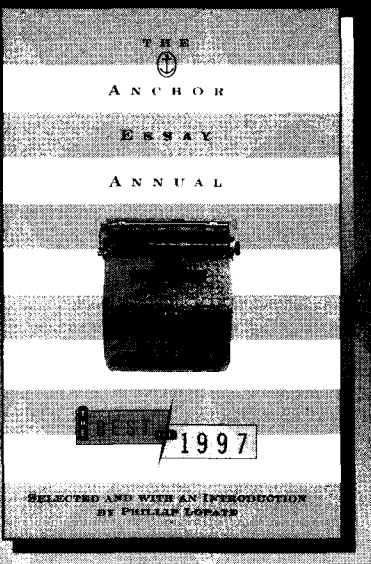
best (bĕst) *adj.* 1. Surpassing all others in quality. 2. **Prize Stories 1997** and **The Anchor Essay Annual 1997.**

"The nation's most prestigious awards for short fiction."
—*The Atlantic Monthly*



Louise Erdrich, Thom Jones, and **David Foster Wallace** select first, second and third best stories from such acclaimed writers as Mary Gordon, Alice Munro, Andre Dubus, and Rick Moody.

Edited by Phillip Lopate, "one of our best personal essayists."
—*Dallas Morning News*



Anchor is proud to launch a dazzling series of the year's finest essays featuring work from Mary Gaitskill, Hilton Als, and Vivian Gornick among others. Here is the first in what is sure to become a much-anticipated annual event.

Anchor Books
Available wherever books are sold. Anchor Books is a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.
Visit our Web site at www.doubleday.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

done by putting extremely accurate clocks on airplanes that show that one of the predictions Einstein made in his 1905 paper on relativity was wrong! He claimed that a clock on the equator would go slower than an identical clock on the North Pole—something that in relativity is known as "time dilation." He did not know at the time that there would be a compensating effect from the Earth's gravitational field that would just cancel his prediction, something that has now been confirmed to high accuracy. Any good modern exposition of this subject would include these results. It would also include a discussion of cosmology. It was only in 1965—two years after Feynman gave his lectures—that Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, then of the AT&T Bell Laboratories, announced their discovery of what turned out to be the cosmic background radiation left over from the Big Bang. Before this time, cosmology, which depends fundamentally on Einstein's theory of gravitation, which Feynman treats in these lectures, was something of a backwater in physics. Now it is of central importance. No modern textbook on this subject would fail to include a chapter on cosmology.

Finally, there is the matter of history, or what passes for history, in these lectures. To anyone who has studied the history of the invention of the theory of relativity, Feynman's comments on this subject, with all due respect, seem ludicrous. They simply show that he didn't care enough about the culture of physics to study its history with any real care. The least of the problems is that the only identification given to these historical figures is, as a rule, by the individual's last name and nothing else. Is the reader—in the first instance a college sophomore—expected to know that the "Poincaré" referred to only by his last name is the great French mathematician Henri Poincaré, a somewhat older contemporary of Einstein. Here again a conscientious editor could have filled in the reference without doing any disservice to Feynman's intent. But that is the least of it.

Feynman has got it into his head that Einstein, in creating his theory, followed a "suggestion originally made by Poincaré" concerning the principle of relativity: the notion that the laws of physics should appear the same to an observer at rest and an observer in uniform motion with respect to the resting observer.

This proposition, which has its roots with Galileo, was emphasized by Poincaré in a lecture he gave in 1904 in St. Louis, Missouri. Apart from the fact that the then twenty-five-year-old Einstein was working in the patent office in Bern and had no access to this lecture, the relativity principle and its consequences were something that Einstein had been brooding about since he was sixteen. What he came to realize, which neither Poincaré nor anyone else had understood, was that it was impossible to maintain the relativity principle for both the classical mechanics of Newton and the electromagnetic theory of James Clerk Maxwell and others without some radical modification of our notions of space and time. What Poincaré and his contemporaries were trying to do was somehow to fix classical physics. Poincaré had an inkling that something radical might have to be done, but only Einstein, with no help at all from Poincaré, saw what had to be done and how to do it. It is a pity that no one challenged Feynman at the time and that this nonsensical view of the history was allowed to stand.

This brings me to the final question: who should buy and read this book? Alas, I think the answer is no one. The non-scientist will get very little out of these lectures. They were intended for very gifted Caltech undergraduates with some background in mathematics and physics. For a young person with such a background why not get the complete set of lectures? They are difficult, but they can be grown into. Why settle for this poorly edited and incomplete sample? No reason I can think of.

Fit to Be Tied

INJURED BRAINS OF MEDICAL MINDS: VIEWS FROM WITHIN. *Edited by Narinder Kapur. Oxford University Press. $50.95.*

Reviewed by EDISON MIYAWAKI

This "archival" collection of doctors' accounts of personal brain injury and brain disease derives from the premise that the "per-

✪ EDISON MIYAWAKI teaches neurology at the University of Kansas Medical Center and at Harvard Medical School.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spective of the healer who now needs to be healed" is qualitatively different from that of the untrained eye. One might ask, in fact, why that professional perspective need be so unique. Is there a singular sense of the circle having come round, when, having treated a malady for years, one is now afflicted by it? Or, is there a truly peculiar experience when a patient (a doctor) actually understands fully what his own doctor is trying say? The fifty-odd vignettes, confessionals, and "auto-observations" that comprise this volume have to do with neurological disease as undergone by physicians, Ph.D. scientists, clinical psychologists, medical students, inter alia, but among them one finds the breadth of humor, obsessive-compulsiveness, misery, fear and loathing, and triumph that is human rather than medical. And when the texts are at their least scientific, they seem to have their greatest power.

The editor dutifully attempts to provide the reader with "a unique glimpse into the world of," for example, transient amnesia, and it is disconcerting perhaps to hear of such tales occurring to surgeons in the middle of surgery—disconcerting, too, to think that similar spells might afflict the airline pilot in flight, the school bus driver with a load of children, or most anyone who is armed. But these are *medical stories*, and the "view from within" (as mentioned in the book's subtitle), has to do with being at once subjective and medical: each author, more or less, is his own case report, and if there were any question about what is being illustrated in any given excerpt, we will have the topic described for us in tempered medical language with selected references in accompanying "commentaries." The fact that health professionals are the storytellers occasionally yields gratuitous medical or psychological rhetoric (for instance, "I continued to strive to make sense of my Parkinson's disease through psychosomatic theory, but had at the same time neglected the converse, somatopsychic which had equal, if not greater, relevance to my condition . . . "), but pathos and perhaps irony can be consequences, too. There is the recurring description of being stricken, either in the prime of a career or on the threshold of retirement after a lifetime's work, *by surprise*. The irony that a neurologist or neuropsychologist, having spent years of his life studying the brain, should be cruelly visited by brain disease runs in the face of the sobering fact that neurologic disease is common; the pathos lies in the sad, misconceived sense that working in the realm of the brain might somehow be that "sweet oblivious antidote" that Macbeth sought for his wife, only to find that his doctor could not minister it.

Some of the stories are very good, and, as with all good storytellers, there is a sharp eye for detail. One likes, for example, the story of the general surgeon in the middle of career gallbladder surgery number 1,642 who had once contemplated putting metal tags (dutifully embossed with the number of the surgery) on the removed gallbladders, just the way they do with whole ducks at a restaurant in Paris. But the problem is, he cannot remember the name of the restaurant; he is aware it is on the Left Bank, just beyond Notre Dame, with a view of its flying buttresses, *"the one with the numbered ducks,"* but he cannot remember the name. The surgery appears to come to a grinding halt on the searing issue of the name of La Tour d'Argent and its pressed, tagged ducks. But the surgeon had already taken out the gallbladder in the surgery, which up until the restaurant controversy had proceeded without apparent incident over one hour and thirty-eight minutes (we are told). The surgeon cannot remember, and asks repeatedly whether he has taken out the gallbladder (repetitive questioning being characteristic of the amnesic syndrome in question), but, like Wordsworth crossing the Alps, he already had. The editor tells us that this vignette is a dramatic demonstration of the distinction between procedural memory (how to remove gallbladders) and declarative/episodic memory (ability to remember the name of the restaurant, to recall that he had taken out the gallbladder) and a premier instance of how overlearned behaviors have a life of their own. As helpful perhaps as the gloss might be as an introduction to types of memory, one remains interested in *the story:* it is not entirely clear when *during the surgery* he began to have his difficulties, but it would seem—by an inference that can only be called interpretive, but corroborated by the narrative text—that the onset of his difficulties dates precisely to 98 minutes into his surgery, after he had done the bulk of the procedural-memory-driven handiwork.

The eye for detail is well represented even when the storytelling lapses into something

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

less than narrative (less like Oliver Sacks and more like William Osler). Take, for example, this discussion of what it takes to swallow for a person with Parkinson's disease:

> Crisp dry food is the most readily masticated; anything that cloys is anathema. "Ryvita," re-crisped in the oven, is ideal. Of a different texture, sponge cake is also excellent, seeming to dissolve in the mouth.

Or, the professor of neuroanatomy who draws the analogy between tying a bow tie and the recitation of poetry or song. He describes himself in the third person after a stroke:

> Under normal conditions the necessary numerous small delicate movements had followed each other in the proper sequence almost automatically, and the act of tying when first started had proceeded without much conscious attention. Subjectively the patient felt as if he had to stop because "his fingers did not know the next move." He had the same feeling as when one recites a poem or sings a song and gets lost. The only way is to start from the beginning.

The image of a neuroanatomist tying and retying his tie (eight to ten times required per attempt) underscores repetition, resistance, or stubbornness (or some combination of all three) as a lietmotiv in contending with neurological disability. Another practitioner—a classics scholar before his career in medicine, now recovering from a stroke—searches for a couplet in his "beloved Horace" which he first studied forty years previously: *"Si fractus illabatur orbis,' / Impavidum ferient ruinae,"* rather like the anatomist standing amid his ruin, tying his tie.

Alternatively, there is the saga in epistles of Dr. Robert H. Rose, a general practitioner in New York City at the time of his language-depriving stroke, from which he made some recovery. "I used *repetition*," he writes, "and could see some headway [in terms of recovery in language facility] but it was very, very slow." The editor of a medical specialty journal had written to Dr. Rose to invite him to report details of his "experience with aphasia" in an article for publication. The invitation—one supposes it to have been gracious in its intent—strikes the ear as lacking in decorum (at least) and ghoulish (at most), but the still-dysphasic Dr. Rose consents, despite being "timid" at the prospect. In a series of at-first choppy, then rather mellifluous letters, Dr. Rose describes a process of memorization by sheer trial and retrial "as an aid in Treatment of Aphasia." These texts were repeated over and over again: Hamlet's soliloquy ("To be or not to be," but in the one recorded version that exists of Dr. Rose, we learn that he elides the phrase "the law's delay," and substitutes "in" for "with" in the line that reads "With this regard their currents turn away / And lose the name of action"); Bryant's *Thanatopsis;* "She was a Phantom of delight"; "My heart leaps up"; Longfellow's *A Psalm of Life;* the Lord's Prayer; *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard;* Moore's *The Light of Other Days;* the Beatitudes; and "Crossing the Bar." It is not clear why this idiosyncratic list strikes one as being so poignant, and yet it is.

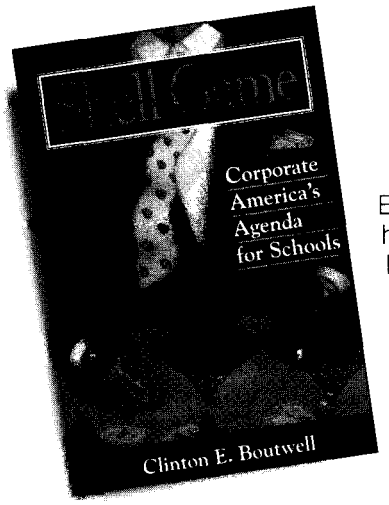
But, why bother with such details, if the intent is to review "classic" cases of neurological disorders or, as the editor describes in his preface, "to consider some of the observations reported in the articles in light of current theory and data in the clinical neurosciences"? The simple answer is that these details, and the interest they generate (when did the surgeon's amnesic event begin, anyway?), are in fact the strength of this volume, more so than the discussions that attempt to distill the pertinent scientific aspects of the disease in question. Dr. Kapur provides this commentary on the emotional instability that occurred after Sir Peter Medawar's right-brain stroke, as described in *Memoir of a Thinking Radish:*

> Medawar gives a graphic description of the tearfulness which he suffered, often brought on by a happy rather than sad event, such as part of a play that he was watching. He insists that this was physiological rather than psychological in origin. Pathological crying has in fact tended to occur with left rather than right hemisphere lesions. However, it is of note that "ictal crying" as an epileptic phenomenon has been more often associated with right hemisphere than left hemisphere foci, and it remains possible that Medawar's episodes were in fact epileptic in origin.

Does Dr. Kapur, whose editorial interventions are typically measured and often interesting from the point of view of the brain and its physiology, really help us with the above speculation? So-called pathological crying of-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PHI DELTA KAPPA INTERNATIONAL

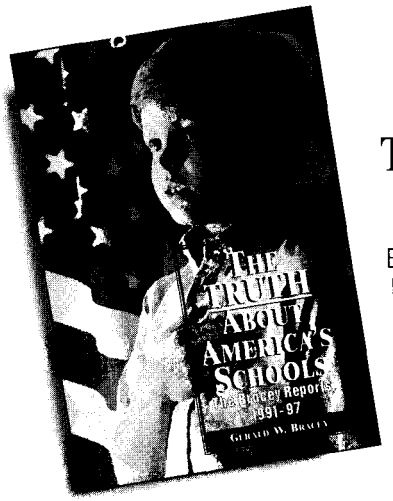


Shell Game: Corporate America's Agenda for Schools

by Clinton E. Boutwell

Education analyst Clinton Boutwell takes a critical look at how Corporate America has reshaped education. Boutwell argues that business has deliberately sought "world-class" education in order to lower the wages of high-tech workers. Education has been a willing, but unwitting, partner in this agenda. Is the push for better educated, more technologically capable workers during a period of corporate downsizing and streamlining just a shell game? Boutwell tackles the question and suggests some illuminating answers.

367 pages. Clothbound. $35 + s&h
ISBN 0-87367-499-5



The TRUTH About America's Schools: The Bracey Reports, 1991-97

by Gerald W. Bracey

Bracey has proven time and again that he is data-driven. No one "owns" him; as an independent agent, he single-mindedly pursues whatever truth can be derived from empirical evidence. Trained as a developmental and cognitive psychologist, Bracey remains true to the principles of his profession. He is not an "apologist" for the public schools. He is not a "revisionist" of education history. He is a truth-teller.

271 pages. Trade paperback. $22 + s&h
ISBN 0-87367-395-6

To order phone 1-800-766-1156

Or send institutional purchase order to Phi Delta Kappa International, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Include $3 shipping and handling charge on all orders up to $25; from $25.01 to $100, add $5; from $100.01 to $500, add $10. Indiana residents add 5% sales tax. Purchase orders and MasterCard and VISA orders also are accepted by fax at (812) 339-0018.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ten accompanies damage to both sides of the brain, as in cases of Lou Gehrig's disease or advanced multiple sclerosis. Crying as a manifestation of epileptic seizure is a curiosity (a mere twenty-five citations from 1966 to 1997 in a quick search), though experimental electrical stimulation of various brain centers (including the brain stem rather than the right or left cerebral hemispheres) has resulted in crocodile tears in some reports. A hunt through Dr. Kapur's "selected references" finds this expectation in a report from 1976: "It is not unreasonable that further clinical investigations of patients with crying epilepsy may produce information concerning the underlying mechanisms of [normal] crying." Do we miss the point with an appeal for a scientific model for tears?

Medawar, who won the Nobel Prize in 1960 at age forty-five for work on the mechanisms by which the immune system develops tolerance to foreign tissue (germane to the then-infant field of transplantation medicine), had described tearfulness as a "most embarrassing long-term effect" of his stroke, "a readiness to dissolve into sobbing"; "it is physiological in origin," he explains, "and is not uncommon after extensive injuries to the brain." But the precipitants for his sobbing are the issue: tragedy, for example, can be a trigger, but Medawar offers a literary purview on the experience of tragedy that is shorn of tears. "It is an invariable characteristic of tragedy," he writes, "that one feels that all the mischiefs and misunderstandings could be circumvented if only one could join the case and say a few reassuring words to the principal characters—'Watch out for the Iago,' you whisper urgently." Medawar's experience of tragedy is more Aristotelian than epileptic, but he pursues his point regarding a phenomenology of tearfulness:

> A moment of glory is a more dangerous trigger than the denouement of a tragedy such as the ending of *Othello*, whether opera or play. . . . Tragedy is bad enough, God knows, but moments of glory are even worse: in Beethoven's *Fidelio* my undoing is not the miserable plight of the unjustly imprisoned Florestan, but the moment when his faithful wife (alias Fidelio) draws a pistol on the wicked prison governor and distant trumpets from the prison tower announce the arrival of the sheriff's posse—of justice, therefore, and freedom.

Medawar's "view from within" would find the overtly tragic either avoidable or, possibly, maudlin. A drama of the human spirit against adversity becomes a rallying call for tears that were not spent on frustration, exhaustion, the death of loved ones, or even the loss of what one was at one time. If these are tears of the epileptic, then we are epileptics all.

Prodigy Among Tragedy

THE BOOK AND THE SWORD: A LIFE OF LEARNING IN THE SHADOW OF DESTRUCTION. *By David Weiss Halivni. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $21.*

Reviewed by JONATHAN ELUKIN

David Weiss Halivni, a prominent professor of rabbinic literature at Columbia University, has written a unique memoir that carries the reader from the small town of Sighet in the Carpathian Mountains to Auschwitz and finally to Halivni's life in postwar America. The two poles of this intellectual autobiography are Halivni's lifelong study of rabbinic texts and his experience of the Holocaust. Moving between these two points, Halivni's memoir opens a window onto the world of Jewish learning and the struggle to integrate that world with modern scholarship.

As a child, Halivni excelled at the intense study of the Bible and rabbinic texts that marked the intellectual elite of his society. By virtue of his precociousness and the encouragement of his grandfather, a great scholar in his own right, Halivni soon became a child hero in the struggle to understand the Talmud. He mastered the nested layers of commentaries on the *Mishna*, a wide-ranging catalogue of laws articulated by the rabbis after the fall of the Second Temple. The commentaries on the *Mishna*, known as the *Gemara*, seek to explain these laws and their relationship to the text of the Bible. Medieval commentaries grapple with both sets of rabbinic works. All of these compose the Talmud, which, according to tradition, is oral law given at Sinai to Moses along with the written law of

✪ JONATHAN ELUKIN teaches history at Trinity College and frequently reviews books for THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Torah, thus sharing in the divinity of revelation. It was within the margins of this textual world that Halivni flourished—until the Germans came to Sighet.

Even before the arrival of the Germans, Sighet was no utopia, at least not for Halivni's family. Halivni's memories of that world are an antidote to more romantic visions of shtetl life among European Jewry. The Sighet that Halivni remembers is one of grinding poverty, class divisions, and growing fractures in the Jewish community. This is not the Sighet that Elie Wiesel, who also spent his childhood there, recalls in his memoirs. (The two Holocaust survivors are now friends but were only passing acquaintances as children.)

Halivni's great skill gave him and his family status beyond their economic position. Although small gifts and awards for various performances of his vast knowledge helped carry his family through lean years, they were still very much outsiders. His grandfather did not come from any of the elite Hasidic families; and, although recognized as a great scholar, he was relegated to a minor teaching position. Halivni's grandfather would not have even merited the most honorable grave in the local cemetery, a thought that still rankles Halivni. (His beloved grandfather died in Auschwitz.)

As a result, the ghetto life that the Germans and the Hungarians forced on the Jews before they were deported did not disturb Halivni too much, because it leveled the Sighet class system. Still, the ghetto world was one of great terror and anguish. Halivni remembers that he knew something was terribly wrong when he was offered *angemachts,* a special jelly preserve; usually the treat was only given to sick people when there was little hope of recovery. That particular purgatorial world came to an end in 1944 when Halivni closed his *Gemara* for the last time. It was the day the deportation train left for Auschwitz.

Throughout his memoir, Halivni maintains a measured and careful tone. The reader actually sees very little of Sighet or of the camps. But the memoir is no less powerful for its brevity. The Talmud is so much a part of Halivni that his memoir has taken on the qualities of that text. Like the Talmud, his memoir's compressed style invites interpretation. Despite his attempts to tell his story in roughly chronological fashion, the text moves back and forth in time. The story itself is so powerful that Halivni needs to elaborate very little on the bare details of the tragedy. Speaking of his sister Channa Yitte, he writes simply, "Hitler took her because of her children, and they were gassed together." Is there a more horrible statement than Halivni's next sentence: "As a rule, mothers went with children"?

If the memoir has a central image, it is Halivni's chance discovery while in the camps of a page of a rabbinic law code. Halivni was laboring in a tunnel when he saw a guard eating a sandwich. The sandwich was wrapped in paper with Hebrew writing. Halivni recognized the writing—a miraculous feat in itself—as coming from a particularly prized edition of the *Shulchan Aruch,* the classic code of Jewish law.

> Upon seeing this wrapper, I instinctively fell at the feet of the guard, without even realizing why; the mere letters propelled me. With tears in my eyes, I implored him to give me this *bletl,* this page. For a while he didn't know what was happening; he thought I was suffering from epilepsy. He immediately put his hand to his revolver, the usual reaction to an unknown situation. But then he understood. This was, I explained to him, a page from a book I had studied at home. Please, I sobbed, give it to me as a souvenir. He gave me the *bletl* and I took it back to the camp. . . . The *bletl* became a visible symbol of a connection between the camp and the activities of Jews throughout history.

This single event tells the story of Halivni's life: the effort to recover and preserve the continuity of Jewish tradition in the face of absolute tragedy.

Halivni's life in Sighet and his experience in the Holocaust shaped the style of rabbinic scholarship that he developed after the war. During his years at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the institution that ordains rabbis for the Conservative movement in America, Halivni pioneered an approach to Talmud study that was in many ways a rejection of his own traditional training in the Hasidic world of Europe. Even teaching at the seminary, which gave him a refuge after the war, marked a break with his Orthodox background. Halivni is something of a liminal figure, trying to live within a world of so-called Orthodox observance and belief, while following a scholarly agenda that seems to call into question the uncorrupted holiness of the Talmud.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Halivni recalls that his grandfather studied the Talmud by looking for the *peshat*, the plain meaning of the text, rather than trying to force an explanation onto the often conflicting and ambiguous Talmudic texts. Halivni carried on that tradition, but he went further and systematically studied the imperfect human editing of the Talmud, a radical step because the Orthodox world assumed that the text could not contain errors. Halivni tries to imagine what the perfect original text of the Talmud would look like before it had been corrupted by errors of transmission. This is not merely an intellectual exercise, for Halivni believes that the closer he can come to the original text, the closer he will come to the moment of revelation.

All of this Halivni presents as a form of modern critical scholarship that is similar to that practiced by secular scholars. Such an endeavor is perhaps dependent on the methods of critical scholarship: comparing different versions or manuscripts and looking for errors in editing or transmission. But to present this attempt to recover the divinity of the Talmud as a critical endeavor points out the liminal position that Halivni occupies. He acknowledges that he has taken a unique and problematic stance. How does one believe in a divinely revealed text while attempting to correct its apparent flaws? "Intellectually, I am almost indistinguishable from a secular scholar, but, unlike one, I still believe in the holy nature of the Bible, believe that God broke into human history, and feel that religious observance is the best way for a person to approach God. A divine text, made maculate by men, is still divine and leaves no alternative but to seek, search, and peruse the maculate document for information on how to live a sacred life." Halivni's struggle should be admired and even emulated, but does his work fit the definitions and reach the goals of truly critical scholarship?

Halivni's intuitive reconstruction of the Talmud texts brings us back to his roots in Sighet. He recounts that one of the factors in his inclination toward the *peshat* model of interpretation was impatience with the Hasidic reverence of the *Tzadik*, the Hasidic master with special powers and access to the divine. "But above all I had difficulty accepting the concept of the *Tzadik*—the leader, who is endowed with superhuman qualities that give him access to the divine not available to ordinary mortals. The concept is a cornerstone of *chasidut*. I had difficulty, not so much in principle as in practice, finding people with such qualities." But Halivni cannot escape the power of the Hasidic model of the *Tzadik*, for he laments that his students cannot follow him to the end point of his method—the point where he imagines what the original text would have been. "This last step, which is highly intuitive, I find difficult to train students to master. They may get close to it but always fall short. . . . This has made me wonder whether my method is not due to something in myself that makes it difficult to transmit." His students cannot make the intuitive leap to the original text. It is something innate to him; he cannot teach it. Is there more than just an echo here of the *Tzadik*?

Halivni's pronouncements on other aspects of Jewish history raise fundamental questions. He dismisses comparative scholarship—seeking parallels or outside influences in the Talmudic text from the surrounding society of late antiquity or the Middle Ages—as fostering a sense of inferiority about Judaism. One may well ask, why shouldn't the interaction of Judaism with other cultures be seen as a source of pride and cultural vitality?

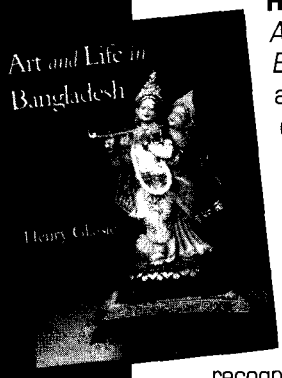
Finally, Halivni's attitude toward the scholarly understanding of the Holocaust is quite unyielding. He would prefer the Holocaust to remain, like Revelation, unexplained:

> There are events in history, such as Revelation to the believer, that exist without explanation; they just exist. They have no "because." The Holocaust should be treated as such an event—an event without explanation. . . . The repetition of the question "why was there a Holocaust". . . causes pain to the victims. The question justifies their suffering. The very question reduces the innocence of the victims and the culpability of the murderers. The question should remain unasked.

Halivni does not discount the need to study the Holocaust: "Let us pursue every detail, every avenue that describes the horror and the tragedy." He stops short, however, at the level of explanation. "But when it comes to explanations, we should be careful, lest we justify what happened. Sometimes the line between explanation and justification is very thin. Any logical explanation will accuse the victim, cre-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art and Life in Bangladesh



Henry Glassie

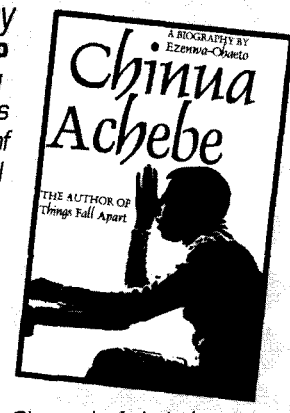
Art and Life in Bangladesh is at once an introduction to the country and its history and a meditation on the importance of art and life and the relationship between art, meaning, and understanding. And far from incidentally, it recognizes the work of a variety of gifted artists—potters, metal workers, painters, weavers, poets.

520 pages, 12 color photos
445 b&w photos
cloth $49.95

Chinua Achebe

A Biography

Ezenwa-Ohaeto



"This pioneering biography draws upon a wealth of printed and oral sources to produce a vivid record of the life and times of Africa's most influential novelist. Ezenwa-Ohaeto is Achebe's Boswell; nothing of importance, large or small, seems to escape him." —Bernth Lindfors, University of Texas

The first biography of the great Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, author of *Things Fall Apart.*

384 pages, 25 b&w photos
cloth $35.00

Charles Sanders Peirce

A Life
Revised and Enlarged Edition

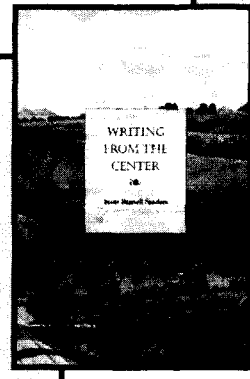
Joseph Brent

". . . an extraordinary, inspiring portrait of the largely forgotten Peirce, a progenitor of modern thought who devised a realist metaphysics and attempted to achieve direct knowledge of God by applying the logic of science." —*Publisher's Weekly*

A new edition issued in paperback of the critically acclaimed biography of Charles Sanders Peirce.

Available April 1998

448 pages, 36 b&w photos
paper $18.95 cloth $35.00



Now in Paperback

Writing from the Center

Scott Russell Sanders

Winner Great Lakes Book Award, 1996

". . . essays of substance and beauty, and they belong beside the work of Annie Dillard, Samuel Pickering, and Wendell Berry." —*Library Journal*

A Lannan Literary Award-winning author's search for a centered life.

216 pages
paper $12.95
cloth $24.95

At bookstores

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS

Orders: 1-800-842-6796
http://www.indiana.edu/~iupress

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ate a burden of guilt, and add to the victim's suffering." Halivni surely deserves the right to shape his own understanding of the event that scarred his life. Still, it is hard to see how explanation is in any way justification.

In the end, David Weiss Halivni has left us all a precious document. It will be of interest to those who study the Holocaust and its survivors, as well as to those engaged in debates about the nature of Jewish law and observance or about the interaction of secular and religious mentalities. Halivni has presented his life as a never-ending struggle between the hope offered by revelation and the endless pain of the Holocaust. That tension is frozen in the image of a young boy on his knees, begging for a piece of paper on which are written holy words. It is that image that should haunt the world. Will it redeem us as well?

Lost Causes, Forsaken Beliefs

A LIFE OF MATTHEW ARNOLD. *By Nicholas Murray. Hodder & Stoughton. £20. U.S.A., St. Martin's Press. Paper, $12.95.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

"My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century, and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is, and interested in the literary productions which reflect it." Thus Matthew Arnold in 1869 wrote to his mother with his usual unapologetic candor. He wasn't just cheering up mother or whistling in the dark, even though his productivity as a poet had been close to zero for some years, and even though—in the sentence that follows—he admits to lacking Tennyson's "poetical sentiment" and Browning's "intellectual vigour." Arnold believed he had tapped into something ("the main movement of mind") that neither of those more verbally brilliant contemporaries had managed to do; and his claim to his mother was, if anything, too modest, since a number of ages later his literary productions—not just his poems—are of the highest interest.

When I was first introduced to Arnold's poetry, in a Harvard graduate-school course taught by Douglas Bush ("Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold"), I was unaware of Arnold's claim in that letter. While I managed to do pretty well reading Tennyson (and not at all well with Browning), it was toward Arnold that I gravitated. Lonely, full of unfulfilled yearnings and deep questions, I was a sucker for the poet of "The Buried Life," "Dover Beach," and numerous other sad laments. In the preface to his first volume of *Essays in Criticism,* Arnold apostrophized Oxford as the home of "lost causes and forsaken beliefs," and the poems he wrote were full of the sense of loss, of absence—exactly what I wanted to hear to make my own absences feel heroic. I memorized "Memorial Verses," Arnold's 1850 elegy to Wordsworth, and declaimed it aloud while pacing about my small Cambridge room:

> Ah! since dark days still bring to light
> Man's prudence and man's fiery might,
> Time may restore us in his course,
> Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force;
> But where will Europe's latter hour
> Again find Wordsworth's healing power?

Europe wouldn't; I certainly wasn't expecting to; but nonetheless these were heady sentiments to entertain, courtesy of memorial verses. In reading and rereading Arnold that semester, using an ancient Everyman selection from his works, I began an acquaintance that would be periodically renewed, always with reward.

The new biography of Arnold by Nicholas Murray weighs in at a reasonable four hundred pages, and, though it makes use of manuscript material hitherto unavailable, it does not cause us to revise our notions of Arnold either as poet or critic (the two halves of the book are divided in this conventional way). This is not a complaint: Mr. Murray's writing is clear-minded and generously appreciative throughout; as a presence he is less intrusive than his predecessor in Arnold biography, Park Honan, whom he handsomely acknowledges. His account is almost entirely free of the biographical vulgarizing of a subject in which a bit of the poet's life is filled in

✪ WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD is Henry Clay Folger Professor of English at Amherst College and the author of *Playing It by Ear* and, more recently, *English Papers: A Teaching Life.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by reading back into it from a poem. Not entirely free, however: "Dover Beach," written soon after Arnold's marriage to Frances Lucy Wightman, begins as follows:

> The sea is calm to-night,
> The tide is full, the moon lies fair
> Upon the straits;—on the French coast, the light
> Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand
> Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
> Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!

In his one venture into how it might have been, Murray writes, "One moonlit evening, during that brief stay at Dover, Arnold stood at the hotel window and looked out on the calm sea and the lights of the French coast. Flu [Arnold's wife's nickname] was with him in the room and came to the window to look at the scene and catch the sweet night air." But this is the single exception that proves the rule of biographical probity and good taste.

The modesty with which Murray puts forth certain "tips" for reading Arnold doesn't hector either his subject or his reader. In dealing with what everyone objects to in Arnold's essays—the repetitive intoning of vague and large-sounding phrases like Culture, Sweetness and Light, The Grand Style—he suggests that we get closest to Arnold "when we give these sonorous phrases the slip and catch his mind in its more spontaneous and flexible performances." Just so, and it is equally just to recognize that a number of Arnold's poems forsake the music of verse in their over-reaching toward weighty and significant statement. Rather than taking Arnold to task for such over-reaching, Murray quietly points out that such elegies as "Haworth Churchyard" and "Rugby Chapel" (their respective subjects Charlotte Brontë and Arnold's father) tend to be "a little too prosy and earnestly gravid." We are left to go on and make the necessary discriminations on our own, should we wish.

If Murray had wished, he could have followed up on his suggestion that one "slip" Arnold's sonorous words and look for more spontaneous and flexible performance in his writing. One of the most egregious instances of sonorousness, guaranteed to produce curled lips on the part of enlightened modern readers, occurs at the beginning of perhaps his greatest essay, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." Quoting himself from his lectures *On Translating Homer*, he defines the "critical effort" in all branches of knowledge as the attempt "to see the object as in itself it really is." Arnold's own attempt further to unpack and refine on this activity consists, typically, in tying more sonorous phrases to its tail, like "free play of mind," "disinterested," and the endeavor to "know the best that is known and thought in the world." Round and round we go, until Arnold changes the game by naming and ironically saluting some current ways of seeing the object as in itself it really is *not*. He introduces us to Sir Charles Adderley, who recently had assured the Warwickshire farmers that the race they represent, "the men and women, the Anglo Saxon race, are the best breed in the world." He gives us a Mr. Roebuck, telling the Sheffield cutlers that England is a country they can walk from one end of to another in perfect security: "I ask you whether, the world over or in past history, there is anything like it? Nothing. I pray that our unrivalled happiness may last." These proud and uncritical boasts are immediately juxtaposed with a newspaper account of a mother who murdered her illegitimate child, the account concluding with four stark words: "Wragg is in custody."

In a brilliant paragraph, Arnold confronts the eulogies of Sir Charles Adderley and Mr. Roebuck with the circumstances of the child murder—"what an element of grimness, bareness, and hideousness . . . the workhouse, the dismal Mapperly hills . . . the gloom, the smoke, the cold, the strangled illegitimate child! And the final touch,—short, bleak, and inhuman: *Wragg is in custody*. The sex lost in the confusion of our unrivalled happiness; or (shall I say?) the superflous Christian name lopped off by the straightforward vigour of our old Anglo-Saxon breed!"

This way of showing what it's like to see the object as it really is not, or shouldn't be, is an ironic-satiric one. As with his contemporary Thomas Carlyle, whom he disliked ("a moral desperado") but to whom his own criticism owes something—it is the blackly comic humor that makes the prose hum. Arnold's irony is more disciplined, less extravagant than Carlyle's, but it animates such classic essays as "The Literary Influence of Academies," "The Study of Poetry," and *On Translating Homer*, each of which is concerned to distinguish excellence from the not-so-excellent, authentic-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ity from charlatanism. T. S. Eliot, who wrote disparagingly of Arnold as a critic (Eliot wished, interestingly, that Arnold had "concerned himself with the art of the novel" and given us essays on Thackeray, George Eliot, Dickens), also called comparison and analysis the task of the critic. Though Arnold's analysis of writers and passages usually stops well short of full-scale demonstration, he had a genius for comparison—for juxtaposing passages and writers in ways that bring with them the exhilaration of humorous surprise. In "The Study of Poetry," for example, by way of leading into the infamous downgrading of Dryden and Pope as, respectively, the founder and high priest of "our age of prose and reason, our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century," Arnold compares three specimens of seventeenth-century English prose—from Chapman, Milton, and Dryden—by way of demonstrating Dryden's achievement as the first writer of "true English prose." What's memorable in the comparison, more than any proven case about how awkward and "obsolete" Chapman and Milton are next to Dryden, is the brio, the sheer pleasure taken in holding up the specimens and inviting us to assent to his argument. The first essay on translating Homer, comparing Chapman, Pope, and Francis Newman's efforts in that line, contains similarly energetic effects. In *Culture and Anarchy*, his longest though not his most successful excursion into ironic criticism of an English society that consistently sees the object as it is not, there is a moment when, preparing to tackle the difficult question of how the State can embody right reason and authority, Arnold pauses: "And here I think I see my enemies waiting for me with a hungry joy in their eyes. But I shall elude them." A perfect gloss on the "spontaneous and flexible performance" his biographer admires.

By contrast, Arnold's poetry has little humor, its ironies are unsubtle, its prevailing tone elegiac. In this connection we may recall that his admiration for Byron's work was very high; indeed he put him with Wordsworth as "preeminent in actual performance, a glorious pair" among the poets from early in the century. The essay on Byron, an impressive one, goes about placing him by referring, among others, to Milton, Walter Scott, Goethe, Leopardi, Ruskin, and Sainte-Beuve, along with Wordsworth. But his fine lines about Byron in "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse"—

> What helps it now, that Byron bore,
> With haughty scorn which mock'd the smart,
> Through Europe to the Aetolian shore
> The pageant of his bleeding heart?

—suggest it was the bleeding heart, the undaunted hero overmastered, that appealed to Arnold. In other words, there's no indication that he was a delighted reader of *Don Juan*, the poem (perhaps the only one) in which Byron is fully alive for us today. Arnold's own poems are most alive when saddest, full of the elegiac "Wandering between two worlds, one dead/ The other powerless to be born" he enacts in the Grande Chartreuse stanzas.

Arnold is, it could be argued, the first English poet to make poetry out of the rhetoric of failure, of falling short, a rhetoric rather melodramatically on display in his late poem "The Last Word" ("Creep into thy narrow bed") that ends as follows:

> Charge once more, then, and be dumb!
> Let the victors, when they come,
> When the forts of folly fall,
> Find thy body by the wall!

But from the beginning Arnold's imagination warmed to examples of failure: "The Sick King in Bokhara" is about the king's failure to help a dead sinner—"This man my pity could not save"; "The Forsaken Merman" laments the lovely woman who left the merman to his watery round; the "Marguerite" poems are about ways of not getting the girl; and "Dover Beach" memorializes the Arnolds' honeymoon by depicting the world as a "darkling plain," devoid of all luminous and benign qualities, in the face of which "Ah Love, let us be true/ To one another!" has a genuinely desperate ring, whistling or rather wailing in the dark.

This rhetoric can be traced through the drama of "Empedocles on Etna" whose hero plunges into the volcano while the shepherd Callicles makes sad music. The songs of Callicles show Arnold's lyric art at its highest: Swinburne remembered how, as a schoolboy, they "clove to my ear and memory," and decades later Robert Frost, faced with the death of his beloved daughter Marjorie, had recourse to Callicles' song ("Far, far from here,/

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

D E Shaw & Co

We know what it takes to earn an advanced degree. We want the skills that got you yours.

D. E. Shaw & Co., L.P., a rapidly growing global investment bank with an international reputation for financial innovation and technological leadership, is seeking unusually talented and accomplished individuals with advanced academic degrees in any area of the sciences or humanities. We are looking for graduate students and professors with a record of outstanding achievement who are open to the possibility of a career they might never have considered before. We neither require nor expect previous financial or technological experience; we believe that your particular talents, abilities, and inclinations will shape your role within the company. To pursue the possibility of a position in our New York, Boston, London, Tokyo, or Hyderabad (India) offices, forward your résumé to grad@deshaw.com or to the Strategic Growth Department, D. E. Shaw & Co., 120 West Forty-Fifth Street, New York, NY 10036.

D. E. Shaw & Co. does not discriminate, in matters of hiring or promotion, on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, military service eligibility, veteran status, sexual orientation, marital status, or disability.

New York • Boston • London • Tokyo • Hyderabad

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Adriatic breaks in a warm bay / Among the green Illyrian hills") by noting grimly that he and his wife, unlike Cadmus and Harmonia in the song, were "not yet placed safely in changed forms." Even Wyndham Lewis, of all unlikely people, said, in a little-known piece on Arnold, that "no greater poetry was ever written than the concluding song of Callicles." (Two lines from that song—"Not here, O Apollo! / Are haunts meet for thee"—were once declaimed by I. A. Richards as he entered a disastrously situated Harvard classroom.) Swinburne was right, and not just about the songs of Callicles: many of Arnold's poems do cleave to the ear and memory, partly because they are so sad. You never know when something wonderful will turn up, even in a rather banal apostrophe ("Poor Matthias") to a dead pet canary. Arnold tells us that birds are, of all "companions," the least available to our understanding, and that in their feathered breasts stirs an unexpressed history of incommunicable wishes and feelings:

> What they want, we cannot guess,
> Fail to track their deep distress—
> Dull look on when death is nigh,
> Note no change and let them die.

One more instance of human failure. Arnold would have approved of, I'm certain, *The Education of Henry Adams.*

And yet in his life Matthew Arnold was fulfilled, with parents he loved and admired, a faithful wife and six children—even though three of his sons died young (Arnold's sad acceptance in letters of their deaths is unbearably poignant). All those years of daily inspecting schools, writing reports, traveling to places where he didn't want to go in order to give examinations, dining out too often as he became famous, trying to make time to read a number of lines from Homer before going to bed just to keep his mind in trim—all this endured with so little complaining, even embraced with something like relish. Evident from the letters is the pleasure he took in physical recreation—in skating, fishing, playing billiards: one would like to think that he found a deal of wordless gratification in such non-verbal pursuits. He complained about lecturing in America, but went back to do it a second time, loving the "abundance of fresh fruit and ice," although, Mr. Murray tells us, he balked at "an immense beefsteak" presented him at breakfast with the president of Amherst College. Arnold's under-appreciated letters reveal that his sanity and clarity and humor—containing, yes, even a dash of sweetness and light—are important parts of making him the most satisfying to contemplate of all the eminent Victorians. A. E. Housman thought so, too, but said it rather more passionately in a memorial tribute: "The great critic of our land and time is dead."

Sporting with Milton

MILTON IN AMERICA. *By Peter Ackroyd. Nan A. Talese/Doubleday. $22.95.*

SPORTING WITH AMARYLLIS. *By Paul West. Overlook Press. $19.95.*

Reviewed by MORRIS FREEDMAN

John Milton's place in the pantheon of world literature has not been firm or unassailable. John Dryden, his younger contemporary, took Milton much at his own evaluation, as belonging in the company of Euripides and Virgil. "This man cuts us all out," Dryden is reported to have proclaimed, "and the ancients too." He paid Milton, not at the zenith of popularity at the time, what one awed biographer called a "memorable visit," to ask permission to dramatize *Paradise Lost.* He structured his powerful political poem, *Absalom and Achitophel,* on *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained,* and he shaped his splendid blank verse play, *All for Love,* in the shadow of *Samson Agonistes,* Milton's final major work.

The largely reverential regard for Milton continued through the next two centuries. Colonial Americans read versions of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* along with, sometimes as substitutes for, Scripture itself. In nineteenth-century England, Milton occasioned a worshipful invocation by Wordsworth, while Satan's lunatically "heroic" defiance of God's "tyranny" in *Paradise Lost* encouraged Byronic posturing. In the twentieth century, Soviet and Red Chinese reference sources celebrate

✪ MORRIS FREEDMAN is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Maryland.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Milton as a courageous early opponent of royal and religious repression, not least because of Satan's speeches and activities. (Milton, in his tendentious prose tracts, had indeed attacked the king, the established church, and the government, obviously at some risk, but that is scarcely a basis for identifying him as a premature Marxist and equating him with mad Satan.)

Regrettably, the prevailing twentieth-century view of Milton seems to be that of a dour, dry, dreary dullard, given to overwriting. T. S. Eliot, in championing metaphysical compactness and eighteenth-century directness, admonished young poets not to read Milton; he later relented and gave permission. The devil in Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, who presides over a domain that is much like a Catskill vacation resort, complains that Englishmen "derive their notion of [hell] from two of the greatest fools that ever lived, an Italian and an Englishman. The Italian . . . , when he was not lying about me, was maundering about some woman he saw once in the street. The Englishman described me as being expelled from heaven by cannons and gunpowder; and to this day every Briton believes that the whole of his silly story is in the Bible. What else he says I do not know; for it is all in a long poem which neither I nor anyone else ever succeeded in wading through."

Shaw's Lucifer, of course, doesn't speak for Shaw, but he does present a standard twentieth-century conception of Milton and of *Paradise Lost*, although more have succeeded in slogging through it than the devil would care to acknowledge. At least Lucifer refrains from ad hominem dismissal of Milton, something Milton's human detractors have not always done.

A number of twentieth-century writers, in fiction and outside it, elaborate the devil's lead in Shaw's play. Robert Graves, better known for his poetry and documentary fiction about ancient Roman emperors and their families, expanded into his novel *Wife to Milton* (1944) what was essentially an old, crude joke. It elaborated one of the small mysteries in Milton's life, his wife Mary Powell's return to her family shortly after their wedding. Graves's whimsy was to have Milton brutally ignore on their nuptial night his seventeen-year-old wife's whimpering that she was having a splitting headache. Graves has Milton attribute the headache to her period. Obsessively observing Talmudic rules governing preparation for marriage, he banishes the girl. (Mary Powell eventually rejoined her husband, to bear four daughters, dying in childbirth.)

Peter Ackroyd's fancy, in *Milton in America*, is to have Milton flee Old England for New England, in 1660, the year the monarchy was restored, in fear for his life. There he eventually leads a small army of Puritans in wiping out a Catholic community. The only basis in fact that I can imagine underpinning Ackroyd's flat, nastily distorted picture of an overbearing, sadistic, hypocritical, shallow, insensitive, exceedingly prudish man is Milton's sonnet "On the Late Massacre in Piemont," which begins "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd Saints," a lament over a mass execution of Protestants supposedly approved by the Pope. With his novel, Ackroyd seems to be exacting vengeance for Milton's lifelong antipathy toward Roman Catholics.

Exploiting a minor but actual occurrence in Milton's life, his brief suspension as a student at Cambridge, Paul West in *Sporting with Amaryllis* imagines a basis and need for Milton's first full realization of his poetic power. It is West's farfetched conceit that young Milton, on his way home through downtown, plague-threatened London, becomes involved with Amaryllis, a muse who works her enchanting sorcery in the form of a voluptuous, whorish young woman bringing to sensual and creative life a number of poets. West has Milton embark on a series of enlightening encounters, evoking those of Odysseus, Candide, and Peer Gynt, which initiate him into the wisdoms of maturity and genius.

West does not outfit his Milton with any of the debilitating constraints we customarily attribute to Puritans, such as the repression of spontaneous feeling and the compulsion to impose on others the denial of pleasure imposed on oneself. West understands that Milton's immersion in secular and religious Greek, Latin, and Hebrew writing was too intense and sympathetic to have him deny to anyone the varieties of human experience in their infinite pains and delights. His Puritanism was much of his own shading, and he kept himself independent of many of the orthodoxies associated with Cromwell's revolution. He contended strenuously with the serious

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

philosophical issues of his life and time, among them the development of the distinction between good and evil, of the obligations and limitations of mortality, of the imperative to find meaningful purpose. It has seemed to me monstrously unfair to envelop and obscure Milton in the distorting atmospheres of the Manichean world of Hawthorne's Goodman Brown and Hester Prynne.

The title of West's book is, of course, from Milton's great poem "Lycidas." While Milton was at Cambridge, a classmate, Henry King, drowned at sea. What's the point, Milton asks in his elegy commemorating King's death, of committing oneself to a poet's career knowing that it can come to an abrupt, arbitrary end? "Were it not better done . . . to sport with *Amaryllis* in the shade?" the shepherd-poet wonders, than "to tend the homely slighted Shepherd's trade / And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?" This is the sort of question that any self-aware young person must answer at some point, in some way, when embarking on any calling requiring sustained sacrifice, let alone that preparatory to becoming a national bard, combining the rarefied majesty of prophet with that of artist, as Milton conceived his mission.

West's answer, simultaneously playful and thoughtful, is that *sporting* is integral to *tending*, that this very, presumably unplanned, London holiday from oppressive Cambridge study was integral to Milton's achieving his ambition. The opening of West's book is disturbingly pornographic as it lingers over the young man's fumbling but delighted responses to his first extended, extravagant sexual opportunity. West is anachronistically modern in his coarse descriptions of Milton's yielding to primitive need; in film, West's outrageous summoning of specifically Philip Rothian detail would be called homage. West's grossness here also reminds one of Milton's own descents later in his career, in his blasts at opposition clergy. (Milton groupies discount these harsh passages in the pamphlets on the basis that reciprocal abuse in seventeenth-century polemic was universal and ordinary, which I'm afraid is another instance of seeing Milton with a halo: his earthy jibes at establishment prelates were often uglier than theirs against him.)

Such shocking material so early in West's book can easily put one off, except that it serves to prepare the reader to see young Milton without the filter of a sterilizing idolatry. West's masterly, good-humored, quite Rabelaisian, disarming wit ingratiatingly compels a suspension of revulsion. He enables us to apprehend compassionately Milton's stressful return from troubled classmate of King to apprentice poet with renewed devotion to his vocation. (West's chronology seems a little murky here, but that's no great matter.) Initial distaste at West's boldness turns to bemusement. ("Lycidas" has been a special problem to critics over the centuries in any case, not least because Milton both identifies with and separates himself from King. Dr. Johnson thought Milton put on his grief over King's death too thickly and mechanically; John Crowe Ransom called the poem "nearly anonymous.")

Readers who accept unreservedly Milton's solemn, extravagant sense of his destiny are not likely to be amused by West's conception of how muse Amaryllis worked over youth Milton. West makes the muse anything but "thankless." But one doesn't have to swallow a word of West's flamboyant writing to find it piquant. It's pleasanter and more comfortable, certainly, to imagine Milton exuberantly enjoying, and benefiting from, fleshly indulgence than to endure seeing him cruelly cartooned as a bigoted thug and assassin.

John Milton never did try to make himself lovable. His works, especially the aggressively argumentative prose, don't suggest an amiable, generous person behind them, as do Chaucer's and Shakespeare's. His confidence in his convictions, his challenging expectation that attentive readers could not but be swayed by his rhetorical mastery, still raises hackles, especially among those who take his passion for proselytizing. The arrogant confidence of his expressed intention in writing *Paradise Lost*, nothing less than "to justify the ways of God to man," must always arouse in sensible mortal readers an uncomfortable mixture of agreeable and skeptical anticipation. Little wonder, then, that over time Milton has generated a weird gamut of commentary intended to be abusive. Sober writers have charged him, sometimes on plausible enough grounds, with being a plagiarist, a wife abuser, a liar, an albino, a syphilitic, and a believer in genocide, among other failings.

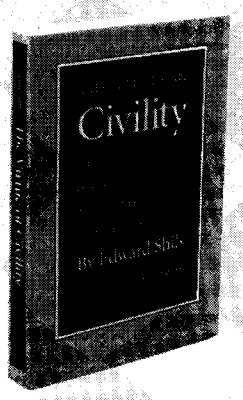
We love to level the great, if only through

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Modern Editions of Classic Works for Today's Readers

THE VIRTUE OF CIVILITY
SELECTED ESSAYS ON LIBERALISM, TRADITION, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

By Edward Shils
Edited by Steven Grosby



Edward Shils (1920–1995) was one of the leading intellectual defenders of freedom in the twentieth century. Learned in history, politics, literature, economics, theology, and legal history, he taught for many years at the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought and at Peterhouse College, Cambridge. In these nine essays, Shils explores the importance of civility and tradition to a free society. The essays' significance is enormous, for Shils was one of the first and assuredly one of the most courageous writers to examine the natures of civility and civil society and their relation to a free, ordered, liberal democratic society. As H.R. Trevor-Roper has written, "Deeply concerned for the Western values of rationality, freedom, and progress, Shils was dismayed by the threat which they now faced: the threat posed by the absolute individualism into which Western Liberalism had degenerated." Among the essays are "Tradition and Liberty: Antinomy and Interdependence," "Max Weber and the World Since 1920," and "The Modern University and Liberal Democracy."

395 + xv pages. Introduction, editor's note, acknowledgments, bibliography.

Hardback	0-86597-147-1	$16.00
Paperback	0-86597-148-X	$ 8.00

"Conceived in Liberty"

For a nation "conceived in liberty," the study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals is a never-ending obligation. To encourage this deliberation, Liberty Fund—a private educational foundation established in 1960—makes available a wide range of outstanding books. In keeping with the Fund's mission, books are both beautifully produced and priced to ensure their availability to all serious readers. We invite you to request a free copy of our catalogue.

Call 800-955-8335
Fax 317-579-6060
or write:

Liberty Fund Inc.

We pay UPS shipping on prepaid orders.

8335 Allison Pointe Trail, Suite 300, Dept. JH17, Indianapolis, IN 46250

Explore Liberty Fund's catalogue on the World Wide Web at www.Libertyfund.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gossip, and particularly to demean and humiliate hypocrites—human enough tendencies that can energize marvelous satire and parody and, not so attractively, vulgar slander. Milton had his problems and discomforts in life, which he generally didn't handle with grace and good sense, with siblings, his father, teachers, clerics, wife, children, politicians, health, publisher, many of which he talked about explicitly and defensively in his prose and sonnets and considered more obliquely in his two epics and one play. In *Paradise Lost*, he digressed frequently about his role in writing the work, explaining to the reader at one point that he didn't expect a large audience for such a noble and grandly inspired undertaking, only a "fit" one. (If anyone feels impelled to give up a progress through the work, it might well be at this point.)

One way and another, Milton may be read as autobiographical in his writing, principally justifying the ways of God to himself. His Eve and Dalila, as William Empson observed, are virtually feminist heroines. The minute, respectful care Milton gave to their portraits reflects a thoughtful sensitivity to women. Like any great dramatist, he paid his characters their due, not least Satan, who has impressed careful readers, such as Dryden, as the real "hero" of the work (in his being formidable, not admirable).

In his fervent divorce pamphlets, published in the years after his first marriage, Milton unmistakably drew upon his own life in referring to the impulses, drives, disappointments, and satisfactions that govern the intimacies of courting and marriage. Milton was endlessly settling scores in his writing, repeatedly framing apologies and self-defenses: among the more touching was his contention that, contrary to one charge, his blindness did not make him uglier than sighted persons. If we commit any "fallacy" in overlaying his texts with his life, it is to find too little autobiography in them rather than too much.

Yet we need not reduce him to a stereotype, as Robert Graves did, or to Peter Ackroyd's revolting caricature to understand that he was fallibly human, often in spite of better instinct and later regret, and may well have had a history that included mysterious, secret interludes, even possibly resembling those that West conjures up. West treats with sobriety the appealing young man he almost gratuitously chooses to call John Milton in the course of his rumination on and personification of Inspiration: with a few changes in setting, West might as easily have made the boyish London adventurer who falls under the sway of Amaryllis a young Will Shakespeare or Jack Donne.

Probes into the lives of literary personages whose work has shaped our civilization ultimately validate themselves if they add weight, provide insight, to the works themselves. One may legitimately wonder what in his personal life may have invigorated Milton's pioneering fervor about legalizing divorce, say, or what really happened to him when he was sent down from Cambridge other than finding time to write two of his lovely early poems, "Il Pensoroso" and "L'Allegro," as E. M. W. Tillyard hypothesized.

It is temptingly, even shamelessly, easy to give free rein to mischievous figments in filling in blank passages in the lives of the famous. The fictionist's minimal responsibility, I should think, is to fit invention to document and text. Thus, Edward Bond's *Bingo*, which premises a distressingly melancholy meeting in their old age between Shakespeare and Jonson, harmonizes with what we know about the men, their writing, and the time. It expands the import of their work.

It is far more challenging and, potentially, more productive for a suitably informed writer to stick to fact, not just to be plausible but to be precise, inflexibly uncompromising about what is evidence, scrupulously discriminating between it and conjecture and possibility. Richard Ellmann's studies of James Joyce and Oscar Wilde exemplify the ideal realization of this challenge.

Unhappily, we have no studies of Milton comparable to Ellmann's of Joyce and Wilde. Part of the reason for this must certainly be that Milton lived in a considerably more distant time. We do have two thick works, by David Masson in the nineteenth century, by William Riley Parker in the twentieth, that have indefatigably arrayed the conceivable data we are likely ever to have on Milton; Parker also tries to summarize much of the modern commentary and scholarship. Nothing in either Masson or Parker, added to Milton's own jewel box of poetry and mountain of prose, however, supports the bilious fabrications of Graves and Ackroyd, and even the appealing caprice of West, who, at least,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

did not set out to disfigure Milton. Not Graves, Ackroyd, or West rewardingly illuminate Milton's texts.

Young Possum

INVENTIONS OF THE MARCH HARE: POEMS 1909–1917. *By T. S. Eliot. Edited by Christopher Ricks. Harcourt Brace. $30.*

Reviewed by CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN

In his verse autobiography *Summoned by Bells*, the late poet laureate Sir John Betjeman recounted an incident from his school days circa 1915:

> And so I bound my verse into a book
> *The Best of Betjeman*, and handed it
> To one who, I was told, liked poetry—
> The American master, Mr. Eliot.

The manuscript book was returned to its young author without comment. Little did the pupil suspect what the master, soon to become a clerk at Lloyd's Bank, was up to in his own notebook.

All the poems that T. S. Eliot published in his lifetime are easily contained in a single volume of moderate length, much shorter in fact than the book under review. A slim collection called *Poems Written in Early Youth* came out posthumously in 1967. The fact that Eliot had written other early verse, some of it obscene, has long been known. As recently as 1984, however, Peter Ackroyd was forbidden to quote in his biography of Eliot from any of this unpublished work—partly because Valerie Eliot wished to protect her late husband's reputation, but also partly because Eliot had expressed his wish that no biography of him be written in the first place.

When he gave an assortment of manuscripts to his New York patron John Quinn in 1922, Eliot declared, "You will find a great many sets of verse which have never been printed and which I am sure you will agree never ought to be printed, and in putting them in your hands, I beg you fervently to keep them to yourself and see that they never are printed." More than forty years later he still described the poems in the manuscript notebook entitled "Inventions of the March Hare" (which by then had disappeared) as "unpublished and unpublishable."

So why have they now been published? Probably few readers of the ninety or so pages of verse in the notebook, still less the frankly pornographic poems removed at an early stage from the notebook but reassembled here, will consider them a contribution to Eliot's poetic reputation. Furthermore, Eliot explicitly refused to allow "any academic critic" to publish annotated editions of his poems. Christopher Ricks, a distinguished British literary scholar now at Boston University, has produced a book in which annotation overwhelms Eliot's poems. As a number of reviewers have complained, two hundred pages of notes precede four appendices.

The result is like those volumes that students of Anglo-Saxon learn to love (or sometimes hate), in which a poem of slight merit fills up a few pages—easily overlooked—between a much longer introduction and an apparatus of notes on which some poor grind spent half his life. Has Mrs. Eliot lost her mind? Or, an even grimmer thought, are we being deliberately presented with an updated, cruder Eliot, an Eliot who might win new friends in today's English departments with poems like "The Triumph of Bullshit"—an Eliot retooled for the twenty-first century?

Although Ricks writes defensively about having violated so many of the poet's wishes in one tremendous go, this marginally eccentric hybrid book is probably the most valuable contribution to Eliot studies since Valerie Eliot's own edition of *The Waste Land* manuscripts in 1971. "Mrs. Eliot," he announces, "who commissioned the present edition, is the best judge of what her husband would have wished in changed cultural circumstances and in the case of these particular early poems." Having forthrightly disposed of that particular responsibility, Ricks took the editorial bit in his teeth and jumped the fence. His enthusiasm was, on balance, fortunate for anyone interested in Eliot.

By combining in a single volume (1) the hitherto unpublished poems that Eliot wrote

---

✪ CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN is Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University and a columnist for the *New Leader*. His latest book is *My Life with President Kennedy*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between his graduation from Harvard and the year of his first book, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, (2) thorough, in fact sumptuously detailed textual and explanatory annotations, and (3) a collection of prose excerpts illustrating Eliot's early views of poetry and the influences that befell him, Ricks has produced something easy to ridicule but of major importance. The book fills a significant gap in the text of a poet who will go out of copyright in another eighteen years. At the same time, it tells us more about where *The Waste Land* came from than any critical study of the early Eliot could have done. Given all that it accomplishes, *Inventions of the March Hare* (Ricks's, not Eliot's) is a bulky masterpiece of considerable economy.

The young man on display here is far from an attractive character, but that will surprise few people nowadays. Nor is he a very good poet until we reach a draft of "Prufrock." Most of the poems in the notebook are experiments with French styles, consistent with Eliot's later insistence that the most powerful influences on his early career were the French symbolists, especially Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbière. The poems get better as they go along, but Eliot was probably wise to omit most of them from his early volumes. The second poem in the notebook, "First Caprice in North Cambridge," contains elements that later found fuller development in "Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," and parts of *The Waste Land*:

> A street-piano, garrulous and frail;
> The yellow evening flung against the panes
> Of dirty windows: and the distant strains
> Of children's voices, ended in a wail. . . .

There is a great deal more in this knowing and at the same time sentimental vein. Eliot can already create an atmosphere, a mood, a setting in a few lines; the problem is what to do with it.

> We hibernate among the bricks
> And live across the window panes
> With marmalade and tea at six

begins "Interlude in London." (The mature Eliot would never have committed the solecism of introducing marmalade at tea.) His ear for rhythm is already striking, but the overwhelming impression is of a bright undergraduate producing imitations of writers who are less talented and interesting than himself. The notebook includes two poems in French (one of them addressed to Corbière), several English poems with French titles, and one prose poem based loosely on a French original.

One thing we don't find here, apart from the occasional lilac, are any obvious traces of Walt Whitman. Their absence is important because critics who are not keepers of the Eliot flame have finally become more skeptical of Eliot's claims about the writers he took as models. "I did not read Whitman until much later" than 1908 and 1909, he wrote to Ezra Pound in 1928, and he was always reluctant to admit the influence on him (discernible in *The Waste Land* and palpable in *Four Quartets*) of a powerfully original poet who was an egalitarian enthusiast for the common man, an American nationalist, a lifelong inhabitant of a century Eliot professed to loathe, and probably a homosexual to boot.

Eliot's wildly misleading statements throughout life about the sources of his work were taken as gospel for so long that Harold Bloom's 1994 description of him as a true successor of Whitman surprisingly jolted many critics who still believe that literary modernism represented a decisive break with the nineteenth century. Ricks evidently accepts the conventional wisdom; most of the quotations from Eliot in the final appendix repeat the story of his dependence on the French symbolists. The poems in the notebook seem to bear him out. But then the poems in the notebook are so mannered and narrow in their range that they never would have made anyone's reputation. The real story of Eliot's early development lies in his rapid progress from these promising but minor exercises in ventriloquism to the major poems that began to follow them a few years later. Instead of a substitute for something to say, the borrowed style becomes a (temporarily) useful tool, supplemented both by other literary influences and by experience.

Then there's the X-rated stuff. Eliot actually tried to get some of it published soon after he settled in England. Wyndham Lewis, who declined to print them, charitably described two of the poems as "excellent bits of scholarly ribaldry." It would be more accurate to say that they represent self-parodies in the Eliot-symbolist manner, polysyllabic allusiveness

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

juxtaposed with the sort of obscenities a backward undergraduate might utter while being forced to read (who else?) T. S. Eliot:

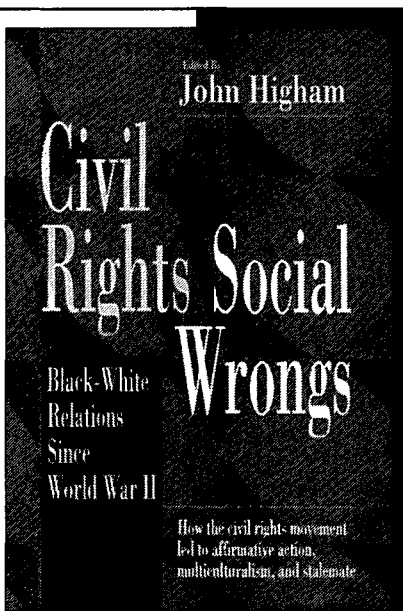
> Ingenuous child with a box of new toys
> Toy lions carnivorous, cannons fumiferous
> Engines vaporous—all this will pass;
> Quite innocent—"he only wants to make
> shiver us."
> For Christ's sake stick it up your ass.

The "Columbo and Bolo verses," of which only a small sample appears here, are packed with obscenity, sodomy, rape, and scatology that all seem gratuitous—a smutty minstrel show with no apparent satirical purpose. There isn't much to say about this sort of thing except that it looks like an extreme expression of the negative attitudes towards sex and other habits of the human body that characterize Eliot's published verse until relatively late in his career.

People who come down hard on Eliot for his racial attitudes—an ever-increasing number in the past twenty years—will certainly find encouragement in *Inventions of the March Hare*. The anti-Semitism that disfigures "Gerontion," "Burbank with a Baedeker," and "Sweeney Among the Nightingales"—all published in his 1920 collection—shows up in a few of these poems, along with ridicule of blacks in the Bolo series. In that respect, the book further damages a reputation that has been in trouble for a long time. On the other hand, these poems make it harder to sustain the (already implausible) case recently made by Anthony Julius that anti-Semitism was fundamental to Eliot's poetic inspiration. It shows up here and there, an occasional tic, not the large-scale obsession that blights so much of Ezra Pound's major work.

Young Possum, in short, was a lot like Old Possum. The most significant discontinuity of style and substance in Eliot's work came not between his early unpublished work and the *Prufrock* volume, but more than ten years later, after his conversion to Christianity, with World War II. The *Four Quartets* unsay a lot of things that the middle-aged Eliot had come to regret. In order to write original poetry, the precocious, neurotic Harvard undergraduate of thirty years earlier had to turn himself, not someone else, into usable material. Doing that involved finding a nervous, allusive method

"John Higham and his colleagues deserve great praise for addressing problems of race and ethnicity in a manner that is frequently fresh and always constructive. We are indebted to them for sharing their views with a larger public."
—John Hope Franklin



Contributors are Christopher Beem, Lawrence Bobo, Edwin Chemerinsky, Gerald Early, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Lawrence H. Fuchs, Nathan Glazer, John Higham, Douglas S. Massey, and Diane Ravitch.

232 pages $28.50
Published in Association with the Batch Institute for Ethnic Studies

Available in bookstores, or from
PENN STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
USB 1, Suite C • University Park, PA 16802

Orders: **1-800-326-9180** • Fax: 814-863-1408
http://www.psu.edu/psupress

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that would seemingly impersonalize his own experiences, making them emblematic of a civilization. In about a decade, culminating with the publication of *The Waste Land*, he did it so successfully that many cultural critics ever since have defined the modern Western world as if it were a reflection of the young T. S. Eliot.

The Christian Eliot has worn less well for most contemporary readers than the troubled heathen of the 1910s and early 1920s. *Four Quartets*, the culmination of his poetic career, is both too religious and too much a product of World War II for our fin de siècle tastes. By contrast, *The Waste Land*, which appeared seventy-five years ago, remains the indispensable modern poem, the gospel of what everyone today calls fragmentation. Ironically, appalled by the seriousness with which many people took it, Eliot eventually tried to repersonalize *The Waste Land*. "To me," he said late in life, "it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling." That statement applies better to the poems in *Inventions of the March Hare*, where he was still learning how best to merge his rhythms with his grumbling.

G. & S., Inc.

W. S. GILBERT: A CLASSIC VICTORIAN AND HIS THEATRE. *By Jane W. Stedman. Oxford University Press. $35.*

THE COMPLETE ANNOTATED GILBERT & SULLIVAN. *Introduced and edited by Ian Bradley. Oxford University Press. $35.*

Reviewed by ALEXANDRA MULLEN

In 1927, the Gershwin brothers, George Kaufman, and Morrie Ryskind were trying out their musical comedy *Strike Up the Band* in Philadelphia. It looked like a flop. Abandoning the almost completely empty theater, the two Georges and Ira lurked outside, when to their amazement they saw two gentlemen attired in the fashion of yesteryear—spats, bowler hats, and serious mustaches—step out of a cab, buy tickets, and walk into the theater. Pause. Finally, Ira: "Gilbert and Sullivan have arrived to fix up the show."

Oscar Levant told this story almost a hundred years after William Schwenk Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan first collaborated on a short post-Christmas entertainment, *Thespis; or, The Gods Grown Old*, in 1871. We have just passed the centenary of their final collaboration, *The Grand Duke*, in 1896. In their twenty-five-year on-again, off-again relationship they wrote fourteen operettas. At least six of their light operas for Richard D'Oyly Carte's Savoy Theatre have entered the repertory: *H.M.S. Pinafore, The Pirates of Penzance, Iolanthe, The Mikado, The Yeoman of the Guard,* and *The Gondoliers*. Despite their old-fashioned trappings, Gilbert and Sullivan still put on a good show.

Two recent books catering to very different audiences commemorate the continuing appeal of Gilbert and Sullivan. For fascinated punters, Ian Bradley has edited and annotated the second edition of *The Complete Annotated Gilbert & Sullivan*. This edition is not in fact quite complete—Bradley does not include *Thespis* on the grounds that the music has been lost—but it is very heavy, since each page of Gilbert's words is accompanied by a facing page of Bradley's notes. Jane W. Stedman, an Emeritus Professor of English at Roosevelt University in Chicago, has written *W. S. Gilbert: A Classic Victorian and His Theatre*, a detailed academic work that places all of Gilbert's oeuvre in his historical context.

Gilbert and Sullivan were consummate theatrical professionals. Gilbert wrote straight plays and dramas, comic plays and pantomimes. Sullivan wrote everything from comic songs to oratorios on sacred subjects, from an opera based on *Ivanhoe* to incidental music for Shakespearean tragedies. Sullivan's sentimental parlor ballad "The Lost Chord" is perhaps both the most popular and the most derided song of the later nineteenth century—still instantly recognizable fifty years afterward when the Gershwins wrote their hit song "That Lost Barber Shop Chord." Although Gilbert and Sullivan each chafed a bit at their partnership, a hundred years later their talents seem perfectly complementary. Gilbert without Sullivan is still funny, but he can be too flippantly chilly and too emotionally shallow. Sullivan's music without Gilbert's words is still atmo-

✪ ALEXANDRA MULLEN teaches Victorian literature at Providence College.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spheric and lovely, but his gift for apt musical allusion can sound bland—like Mendelssohn and water—without Gilbert's edginess. Together, they can be terrific.

There are good reasons why most of us would be hard put to name any Victorian dramatist besides Oscar Wilde (extra points if you got Dion Boucicault or Arthur Wing Pinero). Unless the play was by Shakespeare, the text was not what most people went to the theater to hear. Many plays adapted successful novels or burlesqued other plays. (Gilbert was good at these, once writing a burlesque of one of his own plays.)

Melodramas offered quick excitement—pathos and violence—in which the action would stop for a hornpipe or a comic song whether appropriate or not. It's hard to imagine their awfulness: when canine dramas were all the rage, there was even a dog version of *Hamlet* where Hamlet's pre-Rin-Tin-Tin sidekick loyally sicced Claudius. This play was not billed as a comedy. Not surprisingly, runs of particular plays were usually quite short, but they were quickly succeeded by more of the same. Just like television, really.

Song, dance, melodrama, and spectacle were the orders of the day, and traces of these qualities can still be seen in Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy operas: lost babies and strange coincidences, lavish costumes and special effects (the fairies in *Iolanthe* had electric lights in their hair). Gilbert's characters often build on stock characters, such as the pantomime dame (traditionally a man guyed up as a sexually desperate middle-aged woman) and the *miles gloriosus*, the boastful and bombastic military man. But while Gilbert played within these conventions, his versions of them show a new deftness and polish: there's pathos in the predations of Katisha, and the very well-educated Major-General Stanley is quite aware of his martial limitations.

Professor Stedman makes some large claims about Gilbert's influence on the British theater as a playwright who "began by being compared to Meilhac and Halévy and ended as a standard by which the young George Bernard Shaw was measured." Part of this claim is clearly supported by the serious craft that Gilbert applied to being funny. He was undoubtedly a brilliant light versifier. Some of his triple rhymes give Lorenz Hart and Cole Porter a run for their money. For example, in a chorus for a non-Sullivan work, the disgruntled chorus of dashing hussars has been forced to do their military drills as a *corps de ballet*. Pirouetting, they grouse:

> Never was seen such tawdry trickery
> Soldiers, tough as oak or hickory,
> Turned to votaries of Terpsichore.

Above all, Gilbert took words seriously. He went to special trouble to give his actors the complete script, not just their part books, and frowned upon their departures from his text. He was commended by contemporary critics, somewhat to their own surprise, for writing plays that could be read with as much pleasure as they could be seen.

Gilbert's Topsy-Turveydom, like Lewis Carroll's Wonderland, might be nonsensical but it is never silly. The catalysts of Gilbert's plots are often deliberately far-fetched. What bad luck for Frederic to be mistakenly apprenticed as a pirate for twenty-one birthdays when he happened to be born on leap day! But Gilbert's wildest conceits are grounded in rigorous dramatic logic. The family curse on the baronets of Ruddigore is that they must perform one crime every day without fail or die in horrible torment. For generations, each baronet, eventually sickened of crime, has chosen Death. Noble, no doubt, but it makes it difficult for the latest Murgatroyd, Sir Ruthven, to reach a cheerful romantic denouement with Rose Maybud (or for Hannah to be reconciled with her former wooer, the ghostly Sir Roderic). Fortunately, Ruthven's logic cuts through this Gordian knot: To refuse to commit a daily crime is tantamount to suicide, but suicide itself is a crime, so . . . all ends well, and Sir Roderic, who obviously ought never to have died in torment at all, pops back to life.

Stedman believes Gilbert's most important influence on Victorian acting was to get the actors to play comedy "straight." As a later observer wrote, "Everybody was trained to look serious, sedate, and demure over the funniest things, and to do them as if they were inevitable." Stedman perceptively adds: "Such behaviour lent dignity to eccentricity, but it also furnished a box for eccentricity to burst out of." Certainly, Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* would be impossible without Gilbert's lead in creating a frame of comic dignity.

More than craft connects Gilbert to such

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

playwrights as Wilde and Shaw. He moved the Victorian tendency to slight and evanescent burlesque back toward satire. His targets include institutions such as the army, navy, police, and parliament and fads such as the aesthetic movement. (Meanwhile, Sullivan underscored Gilbert's jokes with his humorous allusions to Italian opera, Handel, and Wagner.) For the most part Gilbert's satiric pokes were affectionate—he himself loyally served as a volunteer soldier and as a magistrate. If his satire doesn't have that Swiftian bite, it does nonetheless get in some sharp nips. Here, for example, is part of one song cut from *Iolanthe* that Strephon sang after he has become a fairy M.P.

> Take a wretched thief
> Through the city sneaking,
> Pocket handkerchief
> Ever, ever seeking:
> What is he but I
> Robbed of all my chances—
> Picking pockets by
> Force of circumstances?
> I might be as bad—
> As unlucky, rather—
> If I'd only had
> Fagin for a father!

This hardly seems strong meat forty-five years after *Oliver Twist*, and in fact the legal censor, the Lord Chamberlain (whom Gilbert once called the Lord High Disinfectant) had no objection—but the middle-class drama critics did. Bradley cites one representative view: "Advocacy and denunciation of this sort are all very well in melodrama, where telling 'points' may always be made with the unmerited wrongs of the poor and the reprehensible uselessness of the aristocracy. But they jar upon the ear and taste alike when brought to bear upon us through the medium of a song sung by half a fairy in a professedly comic opera." If Stedman is right that Gilbert's libretti and plays prepared the way for Shaw, there had clearly been a lot of preparing to do.

Stedman's book is enormously useful in detailing Gilbert's life and in clearing up mistakes. (Although I must admit to feeling a twinge of chagrin that the romantic story of the baby Gilbert's kidnapping by Italian banditti is, alas, probably not true.) As befits a lifelong Gilbert scholar, her knowledge of the Victorian theater world is compendious. For readers with a professional stake in this turf, the information in her footnotes alone is worth the price of admission. Unfortunately for general readers, Stedman falls prey to the researcher's temptation of including facts just because she happens to know them. Too many details—Gilbert's phone number or the name of and odds on the winning horse he pulled in a sweep—can be distracting, and her book too often slips from biography into pedantic chronology.

That said, Stedman is conscientious and reliable, even if not particularly engaging. Bradley can be charming, but he is also haphazard and error-prone—he can't even spell Stedman's name correctly. His book contains no source notes and he gives up defining the fairly rudimentary ballet term *pas de trois* when he doesn't find it in his daughter's ballet books. He performs a real service by explaining topical allusions, such as why traveling on a Parliamentary train was a particularly painful punishment for the Mikado to inflict, but I still had to go to a British dictionary to find out exactly why the train's "buffer" makes that punishment even worse. Oddly, Bradley concludes that women don't much like Gilbert and Sullivan because only one of the thirty letters he received after the last edition was from a woman. My extremely unscientific polling of sisters, cousins, aunts, and female friends suggests otherwise. A far more tenable interpretation of Bradley's small sample is that women don't much enter into correspondence on G. & S. trivia. Bradley claims to offer up his annotations in the spirit of "innocent merriment." In a similar spirit of innocent merriment, I've got a little list of his errors I'll gladly send along if he's interested.

Both Stedman and Bradley are especially engaging when they open windows on variants, past performances, stage business, and production oddities. Bradley's introductory sections to each work are jam-packed with delightful things to know. Take that infernal nonsense *Pinafore*: Did you know that the deck was originally modeled after Nelson's *Victory*? That in America there were all-black and all-Catholic productions? That although Lewis Carroll was charmed with an all-child production, he was saddened beyond words that their little lips lisped "damme" ("How Mr Gilbert could have stooped to write, and Sir Arthur

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sullivan could have prostituted his noble art to set to music, such vile trash, it passes my skill to understand")? I was tickled to learn that Koko, the ex-tailor promoted to Lord High Executioner in *The Mikado*, has been played by both Monty Python's Eric Idle and Groucho Marx (Groucho's Pooh-Bah, the Lord High Everything Else, was played by Stanley Holloway). Such pleasures abound.

For fact-collecting fans of Gilbert and Sullivan, these books are fun, although not, of course, as much fun as the real thing. Just as Gilbert and Sullivan survive both rambunctious high school performances and operatic mugging, they survive these performances, too. As I say, they really know how to build a show.

Eloquent Silence

CHARLES IVES, A LIFE WITH MUSIC. *By Jan Swafford. Norton. $30.*

Reviewed by ROBERT C. JONES

In an article about Charles Ives and his music published in the November 1946 issue of *Listen*, Lou Harrison wrote:

> I suspect that the works of Ives are a great city, with public and private places for all, and myriad sights in all directions. . . . In the not-too-distant future it may be that we will enter this city and find each in his own way his proper home address, letters from the neighbors, and indeed all of a life, for who else has built a place big enough for us, or seen to it that all were equally and justly represented?
>
> Such is the work of Ives, and if we here, in the United States, are still really homeless of the mind, it is not because men have not spent their hearts and spirit building that home . . . but simply because we refuse to move in.

Nearly a hundred years ago, in early autumn 1898, Charles Ives—fresh from Yale University, his role and place in that great city of music still far from certain—began his business life as a five-dollar-a-week clerk with Mutual Life Insurance Company in New York, on

ROBERT C. JONES is Professor Emeritus of English and Philosophy at Central Missouri State University.

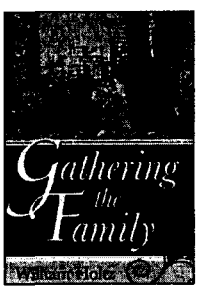
Transylvanian Roots:
The True Life Adventures of a Hungarian American

Renowned Transylvanian-born entomologist Michael Kosztarab recounts his exciting life story, including escapes from the Nazis and the Communists.

"Dr. Kosztarab has been my personal archetype entomologist, largely responsible for instilling my love for entomology, especially systematics."
— Jack Jenkins
Research Entomologist
Pacific Biocontrol Corporation, Arizona

Get your illustrated copy today
$21.95 Cloth • $16.95 Paper
NY/VA add sales tax $3.00 shipping
Pocahontas Press
P.O. Drawer F 800-446-0467
Blacksburg, VA 24063 Fax (540) 961-2847

An engaging, often lyrical collection of reminiscences and autumnal ponderings on youth and family. . . . Holtz captures the essence of family, tracing the way in which, through the generations, strengths, weaknesses, habits, and particular needs are passed down. This is a deeply considered and honest work of universal import."—*Kirkus Reviews*



176 pages, 25 illustrations, $14.95 paper

University of Missouri Press
2910 LeMone Boulevard Columbia, MO 65201
http://www.system.missouri.edu/upress
1-800-828-1894

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the corner of Nassau and Liberty, near Wall Street.

His life with music began where he was born, on October 20, 1874, in Danbury, Connecticut—the place that he would transform, as Jan Swafford writes, into that mythical "primal community" that is "anyplace and everyplace that people do what people do: gather to worship and celebrate and memorialize the dead, all of it accompanied by music."

Swafford presents Ives's remarkable, protean music and his rich and colorful life as a single story. Within this context, and concentrating on the years of Ives's greatest creative output—between 1898 and 1921—Swafford interweaves three primary themes: the composer's vision of community; his philosophy of art and life; and the unity that he finds underlying the seeming chaos of his eccentric, melodic, serendipitous music.

Swafford's perceptive study presents Charles Ives as a person who had "that kind of all-encompassing mind that could be aware of a whole multiplicity of things, all spread around in apparent disorder, but . . . aware of them in exactly the kind of relations they had, spatially and logically, without having them grouped into convenient groupings."

Such awareness, Swafford proposes, stemmed directly from Ives's Danbury upbringing. Of central importance to the composer's musical development was his father, George Ives, Danbury's principal musician. His father was a versatile instrumentalist, conductor, and musical arranger, who had a passionately inquiring and open mind about musical possibilities and who experimented constantly with unconventional tone systems, instruments, and sounds.

One of Ives's most vivid memories from this period was hearing the music of his father's band "in which the players were arranged in two or three groups around the town square. The main group in the bandstand at the center usually played the main themes, while the others, from the neighboring roofs and verandas, played the variations, refrains, etc. . . . The bandmaster told of a man who, living nearer the variations, insisted that they were the music."

Another often-recalled memory was of a conversation between his father and a "nice and educated" young man. When George Ives praised old John Bell (the best stonemason in town) as "a supreme musician," the young man protested: "Why, he sings off the key, the wrong notes, and everything—and that horrible, raucous voice—and he bellows out and hits notes no one else does—it's awful." Ives's father responded, "Watch him closely and reverently, look into his face and hear the music of the ages. Don't pay too much attention to the sounds—for if you do, you may miss the music."

From such experiences evolved what is perhaps the defining feature of Charles Ives's own compositional technique. Swafford writes that Ives "could not separate the music on the page from the way people sang or played it." Where others heard only chaos, a tune out of tune, Ives heard the moving tone clusters "that had been there from time immemorial." He seized on these effects of emotion and serendipity and eventually incorporated them into his own compositions.

From 1900 to 1930, Charles Ives led a double life: Married (to Harmony Twichell in 1908) with the responsibilities of a husband and householder and immersed in starting up his own insurance agency, Ives & Myrick (based in New York but with unlimited territory); and composing furiously, at great heat, during evenings, weekends, vacations.

This was the period of Ives's greatest productivity. It saw the creation and performance and/or publication of *114 Songs,* the *Second Symphony,* the *Holidays Symphony, Three Places in New England,* the *Concord Sonata,* the *Fourth Symphony.* These were also the years when Ives underwent some of his most discouraging rejections. Max Smith, music critic of the *New York Press,* for example, complained that the in-progress *Concord Sonata* "makes me half sore, half cuckoo. How can you like horrible sounds like that?" New York Philharmonic concertmaster Franz Milcke, after trying unsuccessfully to play the *First Violin Sonata* with Ives accompanying on the piano, exploded: "This is awful. It is not music, it makes no sense."

Two decades later, Ives, after such episodes, remembered feeling "that perhaps there must be something wrong with me. . . . Why do I like to work in this way and get all set up by it, while . . . it just makes everybody else mad?"

A severe heart attack and illness in 1918, coupled, perhaps, with the tension and frus-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tration occasioned by such strong reactions, virtually ended Ives's career as a composer. Although he continued his double life through 1930, when he retired from Ives & Myrick, he composed almost no new works after 1921. One of the poignant moments in Swafford's book is Harmony's account of Ives coming downstairs from his study in November 1926, tears shining on his face. "I can't seem to compose anymore," he says. "I try and try and nothing comes out right."

The central story of the last twenty-five years of Charles Ives's life, Swafford writes, was "the voyage of his music into the world." Given the composer's growing defensiveness about his music and his virtual isolation from his profession, that voyage was—and has remained—a stormy one.

Lawrence Gilman's landmark review of John Kirkpatrick's premiere of the *Concord Sonata* at Town Hall on January 30, 1939, was "one of the few completely sympathetic reviews Ives received" during his lifetime. On May 19, 1954, recovering from an operation at Roosevelt Hospital in New York, Ives suffered a stroke. Harmony and his adopted daughter Edie sat holding his hands as he slipped away "like so many of his works, into an eloquent silence."

October 17–21, 1974, the Institute for Studies in American Music at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York and the School of Music of Yale University celebrated the Charles Ives Centennial Festival-Conference in New York and New Haven.

Festival participants were a roll call of twentieth-century composers, musicologists, and performers, headed by Aaron Copland. Concert programs at the festival featured performances of Ives's three major piano works; *Harvest Home Chorales* and other sacred works and songs; secular music, including *General William Booth Enters into Heaven*; and band and organ music. Conference papers ranged from considerations of Ives's place in American culture to lengthy appraisals of Ives's contribution to present-day musical thought.

The neglected American master even made it into *The New Yorker* by way of a William Hamilton cartoon that shows four sophisticated drinkers at a cocktail party, three looking very impressed as the fourth says: "And you know who else was heavy? Charles Ives! Charles Ives was very, very heavy."

You Will Not Taste Death
Jesus and Epicureanism

Despite close Epicurean friends, Cicero called Epicureanism the most dangerous of philosophies because it undermined the virtues basic to civilization; yet it most closely approaches a modern scientific worldview. Two recently discovered documents, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, interrelate with the skeletal chronicle underlying the *Gospel of Mark* to make credible the authenticity of *Thomas*'s 113 sayings of Jesus and give them context. In these Jesus speaks from an Epicurean, not Judaic, stand. Author: Jack Hannah. 321 pp.pbk. $12 postpaid.

FRANK PUBLISHING
1816 Springmill Road
Mansfield, Ohio 44903-8907

For many of us wandering here today through Lou Harrison's visionary city of music, Charles Ives is still remembered the way he was captured in 1947 by the *Life* photographer W. Eugene Smith: the bearded figure sitting poised on a wicker chair, grasping his cane like a rifle and looking up, bright-eyed, at the camera—"the way," his grandson recalled, "he used to look when he was getting ready to play a joke on somebody."

Here, however, is a perhaps more "Ivesian" way of remembering the composer and his music. It comes from a friend recently returned from France:

> At the Fête de Musique this past June in Paris, on every street corner in the city of light, every kind of player and musical group imaginable! Lone violinists, oompah-pah brass ensembles, wandering minstrels, harried string quartets, uniformed drum and bugle corps, dread-locked reggae bands, wistful oldsters with squeeze boxes, even a portable chord organ—the music blending, colliding, harmonizing, jarring off-key, now fading, now blasting in the ear. It was chaos.

Charles Ives would have loved it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Reader Replies

The National History Standards

John Diggins's misrepresentation of the National History Standards will become apparent to anyone closely comparing his attack with the three standards volumes themselves. (Diggins has indicted the standards on at least four other occasions: "Historical Blindness," *New York Times*, November 19, 1994; "History Standards Get It Wrong Again," *New York Times*, May 15, 1996; "Ordinary History," "Can the Social Historian Get It Right?" *Society*, 34, no. 2 (January/February 1997), 9–19; and "Ordinary History," *National Review*, December 23, 1996, 43–44.) But even more lamentable is Diggins's imputation that I was the chief architect of the standards. Diggins refers repeatedly to "Director Nash," as if I were the Soviet Commissar of Culture in charge of the National History Standards. He repeatedly indicts my scholarship over the last quarter century while stitching it into what purports to be an analysis of the history standards. Readers of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR need to be clear on how the standards were constructed and my role in them. Diggins's conflation of my scholarship with the philosophical underpinnings of the National History Standards is a shady business that ignores the collective authorship of scores of precollegiate classroom teachers and college and university historians.

The method in Diggins's madness is consistent with the right-wing attacks on the standards. To claim that the standards on world and United States history are principally the work of one historian, mirroring his own scholarship, is a ploy to convince an unsuspecting audience that these guidelines are radioactive. That, in fact, has been precisely the strategy of John Fonte, Lynne Cheney's right-hand man, and a few National Association of Scholars members such as Wilcomb Washburn and Forrest McDonald. (In many articles, Fonte consistently calls me the "principal author" of the standards. See, for example, *San Diego Union*, November 6, 1994. Washburn asserts that the standards project "was hijacked by Professor Gary Nash and his colleagues at the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA." See "Serious Questions about the National Standards for United States History," *Continuity*, #19 [Spring 1995], 47. McDonald identifies me as "The principal author" in "National Standards of United States History: An Idea Whose Time Should Never Come," *ibid.*, 42, where I am associated with the "left-wingers [who] began a Maoist long march through the [academic] institutions" in the 1960s.)

The facts show otherwise. Diggins claims that I "took over as leader [of the National History Standards Project] and replaced Charlotte Crabtree of the Department of Education" as the standards-writing process got under way. In fact, Crabtree (of UCLA's *School* of Education) and Nash were co-directors of the project from beginning to end. Neither of them wrote very much of the standards other than introductory material and a section on history thinking skills, though they were involved, day-to-day, as editors; processors of critiques that piled in from many quarters; chairs of a dozen two-day meetings of the overarching National Council; coordinators of blackboard sessions where teachers and scholars constructed the standards; and correspondents with hundreds of involved educators. Their role was to administer a complicated, sometimes cumbersome, but democratic process having these salient elements:

—a policy-setting body called the National Council for History Standards consisting of the presidents of nine major organizations and twenty-two other nationally recognized administrators, historians, curriculum advisors, and teachers.

—two task forces of teachers in world and United States history, drawn equally from el-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ementary, middle, and high schools, who worked with academic historians to draft the standards.

—nine organizational focus groups, composed of decorated teachers and eminent historians, that critiqued drafts of the standards as they were generated.

—a National Forum consisting of thirty-one national organizations that had input into the creation of the standards and reviewed the penultimate draft.

This collaboration and consensus building among K–12 teachers and college historians was unprecedented. Never in the long history of public education, reaching back to the seventeenth century, has such an effort been made to achieve such collaboration on a curricular project of this kind. Diggins, following the lead of ultra-conservative op-ed writers who maligned the standards, would have readers believe that I hijacked the history standards, infusing them with my own version of history. Carol Gluck, a member of the National Council that oversaw the writing of the three books, has it right: "If the standards were hijacked at all, they were hijacked by America, through an admirable process of open debate that could probably only happen in the United States." [*New York Times*, November 19, 1994]

With all the involvement of organizations from Lutheran and Catholic educators to the Native American Heritage Commission to the American Federation of Labor to the Council of State Superintendents of Education, to what extent did the project leaders lead? They led, as best they were able, by mediating between sharply differing points of view. These differences, as might be expected, appeared at every level of debate: in the National Council's protracted deliberations, in open discussion among the representatives of the Forum organizations as the project got under way and when they reconvened to look at the penultimate draft of the standards; in the disparate critiques of the nine focus groups (which often were internally divided on this point or that), and in the teacher task force meetings, which consumed thousands of hours over three summers and several Christmas break sessions at UCLA.

Such disagreements, with rare exceptions, were part of the give-and-take that characterized standard setting in geography, science, the arts, and other disciplines. This is not surprising, especially given the healthy ferment in a historical profession opening up new avenues of research and constituted much more broadly than at any time in the past. Consensus is not unanimity, and probably no member of the National Council, the Forum organizational representatives, the focus groups of the "Big Nine" organizations, and the teacher task force writers was entirely satisfied with the final version of the standards that the National Council approved or with the revised version that appeared seventeen months later. But for the vast majority of the hundreds of teachers and historians involved in the project, the standards faithfully reflected the outpouring of scholarship in the last two generations that has expanded our historical consciousness in ways that befit a democratic society.

Diggins's beef is with the scholarship of recent decades, especially that dealing with the forgotten groups that social historians have restored to our national memory. He especially deplores my efforts in this broadening of our historical gaze. I cheerily welcome his criticisms of my own work—a natural part of scholarly discourse. But he is dishonest in pretending that "Director Nash" is the moving intellectual force behind the National History Standards; and he does no service to improving historical education by dismissing the collective authorship of classroom teachers and historians who have recently been committing themselves to working together in the cause of greater historical literacy.

GARY B. NASH
University of California
Los Angeles

JOHN PATRICK DIGGINS replies: "Misrepresentation"? "Dishonest"? Does Nash belong to the AHA or the IRS?

In the several pieces I wrote criticizing the history standards, ninety-five percent of my discussion dealt with the substantive issues in the document, especially the new social history that has misled students into believing that workers and their wonderful "moral economy" are virtuous and everyone else who is white and male is vicious. Rather than defend the substance of the standards, Nash defends its procedures, and even here one would think he would acknowledge that he had the final say on who would be on the committee reviewing the document.

What perplexes me about the standards is that the values and skills that it announces it will teach cannot readily be taught based on the materials and cultures that are to be studied. In *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*, Glazer quotes me: "The most glaring contradiction is that its authors seek to inculcate political values characteristic of the Western World that cannot be derived from what they would have students learn about the non-Western world." "This," Glazer adds, "strikes me, as a reader of the standards, as quite true." Glazer also adds: "Diggins strikes perhaps his strongest blow against the United States history standards by citing how they start off the nation's history," and then he proceeds to discuss the laughable "convergence" thesis.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I have a question for the standards authors. If America is to be explained by a fifteenth-century coming together of Islamic West Africa, pre-Columbia South America, and Northern Europe, at what point in history did these three regions diverge to become profoundly different cultures? If America evolved from common origins with the rest of the world, any attempt to recognize ourselves in the *other* would be looking into a mirror. In the history standards, historical understanding dissolves into a mythology that is unaware of its desperate delusions.

Great Dane

Aristides ("Grow Up, Why Dontcha?" Autumn 1997) recklessly labels Soren Kierkegaard a "brilliantly gloomy Swede." In fact, the philosopher was, like Hamlet, a brilliantly gloomy Dane.

STEVEN G. KELLMAN
The University of Texas
San Antonio, Texas

ARISTIDES replies: Oops.

Erratum

The editors apologize for changing a word in Morris Freedman's article "By O'Hara Besotted" in the Autumn 1997 issue. On page 586, column 1, line 13 the author's word *incredible* (meaning unbelievable) was changed to *penetrating*, thereby changing Professor Freedman's meaning.

NEW AUTHORS
PUBLISH YOUR WORK
ALL SUBJECTS CONSIDERED
Fiction, Biography, Religious, Poetry, Children's.
AUTHORS WORLDWIDE INVITED.
WRITE OR SEND YOUR MANUSCRIPT TO
MINERVA PRESS
2 OLD BROMPTON ROAD, LONDON SW7 3DQ, ENGLAND

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation (Act of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code)

1. Title, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR; 2. Date of Filing, October 25, 1997; 3. Frequency, Quarterly—March, June, September, December;
4. Office of Publication, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.
6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor: Publisher, Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009; Editor, Joseph Epstein, 522 Church Street, Evanston, Illinois 60201.
7. Owner: Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009; No Stockholders.
8. Known Bondholders, Mortgages, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None.
9. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal Income tax purposes have not changed during preceding 12 months.

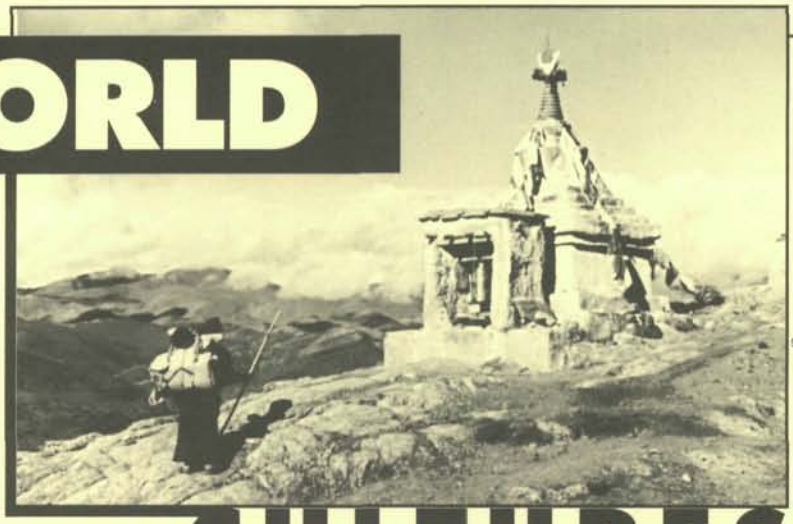
	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
10. Extent and Nature of Circulation		
A. Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run)	29,319	29,668
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales	2,349	4,546
2. Mail Subscriptions	21,403	18,850
C. Total Paid Circulation	23,752	23,396
D. Free Distribution by Mail Carrier or Other Means Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies	1,315	1,313
E. Total Distribution (Sum of C and D)	25,067	24,709
F. Copies Not Distributed		
1. Office Use, Left-Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing	1,651	4,555
2. Returns From News Agent	2,601	404
G. Total (Sum of E&F—should equal net press run shown in A)	29,319	29,668
H. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	95%	95%

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Douglas W. Foard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WORLD CULTURES



From *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*

The Snow Lion and the Dragon

China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama
Melvyn C. Goldstein

"A marvelously informative and realistic look at both how China and Tibet reached their present impasse and how their differences might yet be peacefully resolved."
—Orville Schell, author of *Mandate of Heaven*

"Regardless of one's point of view, this book should be read by anyone concerned with China, China's relations with the West, and the endangered people of Tibet."
—Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke

$19.95 cloth, illustrated

At bookstores or order 1-800-822-6657. www.ucpress.edu

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Border Matters

Remapping American Cultural Studies
José David Saldívar

"Exemplary in its detailed and sophisticated investigation of cultural texts. . . . A valuable work of intellectual history as well as a tour de force of contemporary cultural criticism."—George Lipsitz, author of *Time Passages*

"A groundbreaking work that does much more than define a new field—it revolutionizes the predominant ways we tend to organize intellectual inquiry."—Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, author of *Rethinking the Borderlands*

American Crossroads, $40.00 cloth, $15.95 paper, illustrated

From My Grandmother's Bedside

Sketches of Postwar Tokyo
Norma Field

"Field's free-form memoir has the excitement of Picasso's cubism and the aching sweetness of a Japanese folk song. Her salute to her grandmother is a love poem to all those old ones who have survived the storm and are dying with grace."—Studs Terkel

"She makes autobiographical writing seem deceptively easy. That ease is, in fact, the mark of a consummate writer."
—Rey Chow

$24.95 cloth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW FROM CAMBRIDGE

D. H. Lawrence

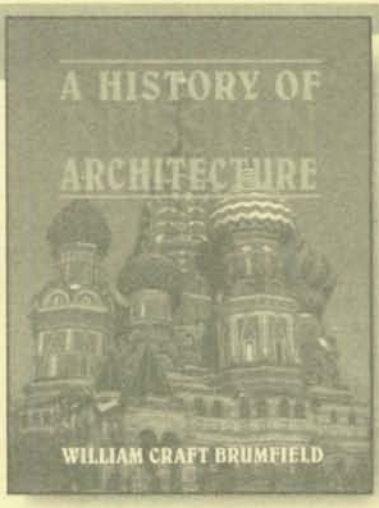
Volume 3: Dying Game 1922-1930

David Ellis

The final volume of the Cambridge biography of D. H. Lawrence chronicles his progress upon leaving Europe in 1922 to his death in Vence in 1930. Based on much new or unfamiliar material, it describes his travels in Ceylon, Australia, the United States, and Mexico in an increasingly desperate search for an ideal community. There is a detailed account of his rediscovery of painting, his battle against censorship, and the vitality with which he resisted the debilitating effects of tuberculosis. *Kangaroo, The Plumed Serpent,* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are usually seen as the literary landmarks of these years, but Lawrence also wrote remarkable novellas, essays, criticism, short stories and poems. Lawrence is revealed here not as the impotent and self-obsessed figure of popular legend, but as a man more complex, more humorous, and more exemplary in his resolute grappling with the central problems of life and death.

25421-3 Hardback $44.95

Now Available in Paperback...



A History of Russian Architecture

William C. Brumfield

"It is a pleasure to welcome William Craft Brumfield's massive and handsome new work....Lavishly illustrated with black and white photographs, sketches and color plates, it should relegate to well-deserved oblivion the condescending view that Russians have no architecture. In scope, information and visual beauty, Mr. Brumfield's book far surpasses the former English language mainstay..."

—The New York Times Book Review

The most comprehensive study of this subject to date, *A History of Russian Architecture* surveys Russian building from the masonry churches of tenth-century Kieven Rus to the prefabricated built environments of the present.

59724-2 Paperback $49.95

Available in bookstores or from

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211.
Call toll-free 800-872-7423. Web site: http://www.cup.org
MasterCard/VISA accepted. Prices subject to change.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED